

RESPONSIBILITY



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RESPONSIBILITY

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L. OF C. (Lines of Communication)

BUZZ, BUZZ! Essays of the Theatre

RESPONSIBILITY

A NOVEL

BY

JAMES E. AGATE



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TO
ARNOLD BENNETT
IN
DISCIPLINED ADMIRATION

LUS LA CROIX HAUTE
FRANCE

Midsummer, 1918

835943

Au grand jour du Seigneur sera-ce un grand refuge
D'avoir connu de tout et la cause et l'effet ?
Et ce qu'on aura su fléchira-t-il un juge
Qui ne regardera que ce qu'on aura fait ? . . .

L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ.

We sang to-night in Church, "But when I know Thee as Thou art, I'll praise Thee as I ought." Exactly ! Till then, farewell. We are a great little people, we humans. If there be no next world, still the Spirit of Man will have lived and uttered its protest.

W. N. P. BARBELLION.

Read Thomas à Kempis in the train. It made me so angry I nearly flung it out of the window. "Meddle not with things that be too deep for thee," he says, "but read such things as yield compunction to the heart rather than elevation to the head." Forsooth !

W. N. P. BARBELLION.

INTRODUCTION

i

EN toute chose il faut considérer la fin. In all things the end is to be looked to—in the case of novels the last chapter. Curious that the weakness of the frail—heart beating too flutteringly for a “good read” until assured of the fate of the beleaguered and distressed—should go hand-in-hand with discernment. The good reader demanding a bouquet of writing as well as his bellyful of story does well to take the edge off grosser appetite that he may properly savour the fineness of the dish. It is for the epicure’s sake, therefore, that I begin my story at the end, simple madness to the plain man who will see scant reason for not beginning at the beginning. But I confess to being an opportunist who would make the best of as many worlds as there may be, hankering in truth after a still more generous provision. Alas that man’s creation of new worlds is nowhere possible save in’s own brain! The wise man does the best with what he has, still on this poor planet rejoicing in his liberty to tell his story in his own way. I beg, therefore, to inform my readers—or such of them as have already indulged in furtive glances at my last leaves—that I have been before them. The chapter which finds itself last in point of binding is in reality my last but one, the present page the end of the tale.

I am in a Base Hospital, my turn at the war done, my “bit” accomplished. The doctors have decided that I am to be sent home “for discharge.” Then

England, formalities, and release. I am unfit for further service, without scars to show, returnable to civil life at forty-nine and with liberty to wring out of the world whatever entertainment or what further bitterness it yet may hold. My chief feeling is that I must be good for effort yet, that life cannot be over. There is atonement to be made, an atonement non-cloistral, giving scope for effort. I have little patience with those natural heartaches to which the most innocent flesh is heir, the unmerited sufferings that are a part of normal inheritance. My sympathies are with the man who has "only himself" and not Providence to blame, with the well-meaning blackguard, the rascal who has found it easier to deceive the world than to silence "the promptings of his better nature." It is twenty years since I "sat under" parson, but the worn phrases die hard. Jargon sticks like a burr.

One of my small activities on return to civil life will be the founding of a Society for the Establishment of Greater Confidence between Author and Reader. I hate to hold you, Sir, in suspense; a *dénouement* which depends upon the element of surprise is essentially a disappointment at a second reading—and who is the writer who will be content with a single taste of his quality? Certain it is that a tale which is tolerated only for its happenings is not worth the dog's labour of setting down. So I lay my cards on the table. They consist of a sorry hero, a mistress adored and abandoned, and a son. That's the superficial story. Shuffle the cards as you will and you get the same essentials, the same passion, the same remorse. And yet remorse is hardly the word. Remorse implies

the promise that were you granted life again you would live differently. Oh last poltroonery! I understand a vow to greater prudence and a more careful closing of shutters, but not a deliberate avoidance and lessening of experience. I am what I am, and if I am to act differently at a second venture I must be made differently.

I turn over those sheets which have been this year's constant companion and wonder how a story so absorbing in the living can become so trivial in the telling. I set out to write soberly; correct as I will, zest, flippancy even, obtrude themselves and half-obliterate the page. But this, it seems to me, is to the reader's good; "No whining" ever a proud device. I do not understand the subordination of general interest to private emotion. Colour and sound go on though the texture of one's own life be temporarily darkened. No grief so poignant that one cannot take up *Macbeth*; no reason why we should not bury our dead and desolately turn to *Hamlet*. To lock the piano till the *crêpe* is worn out—see any *bourgeois* household—is the most preposterous of quarantines. . . .

I hope to stress my private melancholy as little as may be. Let me make it clear that though the end of the story is not enlivened with wedding-bells neither is it *faisandé* with the flavour of the divorcee court. It does not end conclusively as a well-thought-out symphony of life should end. It does not go down in gloom like the pathetic Russian's. Its final chord has neither the stained-glass quality of *Tod und Verklärung* nor the last din and crow of *Heldenleben*. Still less do I find it paralleled by the tinkle of the slippered, inconsiderable *Farewell*. If you urge me to

a comparison I would say an apotheosis of *Don Quixote*—heavens! how high we fly—with a hint of *Til Eulenspiegel*. I may have missed my way in life, but at least I know my visionaries and my rogues.

Illegitimacy's my theme, the slur of illegitimacy—oh, not the slur on the child, that old stumbling-block which has defrayed the tears of the servants' hall since servants learned to read, but the slur on the father. And yet not slur—I am to stress the essential difference between that fatherhood which is wilful and that which is careless, between the fulfilment of great purpose and meaningless gratification. And the moral? I have puzzled the nights through over any possibility of moral deduction. I have not been content to let life come to me, I have gone towards it urgently. I have satisfied curiosity and desire and no obvious punishment has attended the evil I have done. "What have we to do with genus and species, the dry notions of logicians? He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh is delivered from a world of unnecessary conceptions." So Thomas à Kempis. I have talked my fill of genus and species, I have teased my brain with the driest notions of logicians. I have denied dogma and taken my stand upon the Eternal Word of reason and natural law. And, embracing logic, I have neglected the one logical act of man's existence—the handing on of the will to live. My unknown son comes to me late in life and my worst punishment is that the joy I have in him is illicit, a theft from nature; my sacrifice of him shorn of all that nobility and grandeur which was every English father's. And even now, it is not plain sailing. There was never any question of marriage with Clare. Common-sense was against it; worldly

wisdom has always opposed such marriages. And to preach an earlier renunciation were for fools and children. So that we come to the weighing of the injury to Clare against the existence of that fine, sensitive creature of our fashioning—a weighing in the balance which is altogether too brainsickly.

ii

Were I a French writer I would depict for you my ward in hospital and the blue, tideless wash of the Mediterranean—all in half-a-dozen sentences and in terms of chair-legs, table-covers and *garnitures de cheminée*. No writers are defter at deducing a people from its furniture. They are the Cuviers of fiction, supposing it to have been that philosopher who first reconstructed the prehistoric from its jaw-bone. But I am neither Cuvier nor a Frenchman, nor anything more subtle than your loyal Briton, and a military hospital is, alas! the most familiar thing in the world. I shall merely postulate truckle-beds, bare boards and strips of matting, charts and electric light, neatness and order.

As I sit about the ward my mind goes back to those infinitesimal or world-shaking happenings—so much depends upon the point of view—which have brought me to my present middling and inconclusive pass. It occurs to me that there is something wrong with man's sense of proportion. Which of us has not heard some Astronomer Royal announce amid apathy the relative sizes of the planet men inhabit and the one they call Jupiter? The sun, he will thunder out amid silence which you would do wrong to take for apprehension,

is I forget how astoundingly many times greater than this miserable suburb. Infinite Space is so vast, the lecturer declares, that it is permissible to conceive of stars—why do astronomers always invite us to conceive *of* a thing?—whose light, though travelling at a preposterous number of miles a second, will be too late for the Earth's cooling. Infinite Time is so long that a bird which shall brush Ossa with its wing once in a million years will, before his first second is run, reduce that mountain to a wart. The lecturer has some literature, it would seem, but enthusiasm is confined to water-bottle and glass, skipping like the little hills to the thudding of a declamatory fist. We are invited to conceive the inconceivable by imagining the universe as a corpuscle in the blood of an undetected organism. Where, is all we wonder, did astronomers find time for Anatole France? Then in pleasant vein—for our lecturer is not the pedagogic ass pure and simple—he will upbraid us for pretending to the particle, for presuming to call ourselves The Earth instead of Vulcan or Apollo. Are not our noses in danger of being put out if it be found at some future date that a rival body, say the flighty and presumably French-speaking Venus, shall all this time have been calling herself *La Terre*? Would she not have done better to content herself with the humbler *Chez Nous*, and we with the Saxon equivalent? Is not all that we are allowed to know represented in these two simple words? The earth is ours for the moment, though there are those who would assure us of some future habitation, nebulous, elusive, non-committal. Nor are they even dimensionally precise, these others; to hear them it may be our destiny to become flatter than plaice, or,

like wraiths, elongable at will. In the meantime we have earth and the minute, *bon souper, bon gîte* . . . and mankind makes war one upon another.

I sit in this tidy ward and watch the "Sisters"—chivalry's neatest designation. Common soldiers that we are, there is an atmosphere about "Sister." The better-bred "Nurse" had potency but not magic. "Sister" will safeguard a woman through the dark passages of a man's mind as "Doctor" will avail in the dark alley. I sit and watch the untiring Sisters as they patch the bodies and minds of an undistinguished score of us, rough and reverential in our ill-fitting blue, sunlight resting like a benediction on our hands pale as any woman's. Save for the yellow between first and second finger. You cannot escape the tell-tale stains and hold cigarettes with the lighted end towards the palm, the thumb in readiness to flick, conveyance to the mouth effected tipplingly with a jaunty turn of the wrist. All soldiers smoke so, a detail which documentors of the social epoch would do well to note.

I gaze listlessly at my brothers-in-arms, happy, go the luck with them or against, cheerful, uncomplaining, uncritical. Maimed even, they have life before them, whilst I have only expiation. I have "got my ticket"; to-morrow I am to be "evacuated." Curious characteristic of war that it should discover gold in much of humanity which one had carelessly thought dross and at the same time unashamedly debase the currency of intercourse. "England expects that every tank this day will do its damndest" is at once the herald of proud deed and a blot on the scutcheon of speech. We are to realise that all beauty which is not that of

efficiency is to hide her face for a hundred years to come. Or is it only that pedantry and preciousness are banished? Certain we may be that for a generation all music is to be in common time, the march of victory or that wringer of hearts from *Saul*, all verse a pæan or a dirge, all sculpture a triumphant battle-piece or broken column, all architecture the reassembling of the bricks of Belgium. Hard for those who care little for elementary things, for those now to be put on the shelf, encumbrance, wreckage, broken even for dilettantism. Not for me the heroic end, the contented subsidence, that readiness which is all. Nenni. Rather the slow continuance, the looking back on a life not to be resumed, the contemplation of dead passion and the belated adventuring after better things. Most unthinkable of all, not even now to be immune from fret and fitfulness. Is it not grotesque that I who have my son to content me should fear renewed fever?

With the Incomprehensible facing him, man calmly contemplates the killing of his fellow-man. Astounding to the sober-minded has been the refusal of some of us to give more than our lives for the country in which we happen to have been born.

Et puisqu'il n'est qu'un ciel, pourquoi tant de patries? is good poetry but poor patriotism. I have loved the world too well to love my country best. When England's intentions are worthy of her I shout for England, but that is all. Calm yourself, good reader, I am no pacifist. So long as there lives one hound of hell who tortured brave lads at their mercy my voice for Germany is still.

The war, they tell us, is the final struggle between the

forces of Light and Darkness. . . . Shall Civilisation Go Under? . . . If Germany Wins Will the World Be Worth Living In? . . . See any platform speech or newspaper article during the last four years. Agreed, agreed passionately if you will, but are there no other things left remarkable beneath the visiting moon? Agreed that this war pigmies the clash of earlier civilisations, that admission does not throw out of drawing *The Last Judgment* of Michael Angelo nor cause the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare to limp.

There is a breed despised by soldiers who will do all a passionate patriotism enjoins upon it except think about the war. The last enemy, we hold, is Death, and He should have no allies save Want, Disease and Crime. There may have been tragedy and nobility in the idea of war when the nations were children together; there is tragedy in the present conflict and endless nobility in its wagers, but these will not avail to prevent the notion of war amongst Earth's civilised peoples from striking, say, her neighbour planets as gallant buffoonery. I hold war to be unworthy of a moment's thought in the sense that the mob which guillotined the flower of France was unworthy of an exquisite's contempt, in the sense that the Teuton, though he may maim and kill our bodies, has no claim upon our minds. But this is the personal wrangle. It is the abstract state of war which, draining our life-blood, straining hearts to bursting, is without interest. Bear with me, reader; I am no pacifist. The war has killed my best friend and mutilated my son. I am no peacemonger, though I declare war to be folly. Hail the moderate man who said: "All war is damnable. We shall be scoundrels if we keep out of this!"

Take courage, you unwarlike men of war who have stood the supreme test. Be of good cheer, you men of peace who have kept flying the flag of the ideals of peace. Be not downcast, you reasonable civilians. Conservatives with the workers' interests at heart, if any such exist ; broad-minded Liberals, or such of you as fly so astonishing a banner ; order-loving Socialists, if the qualification does not eliminate you, lift up your hearts and be comforted ! As you are statesmen and not mere politicians, be assured that whatever your hands found mightily to do in days of peace will not be superseded by a mentality born of war.

I hold no brief for any political faith. I am indifferent to the measures for the eradication of grouse-disease which engrossed the minds of the Conservative landowner in the months before the war, unmoved by those splendours of Proportional Representation which were the stuff of your Radical journalist's thoughts by night and his dreams by day, unthrilled by any Socialist cry of "Every Man his own Landlord." And yet I declare with the utmost fury of which the moderate man is capable, that the dreams of plutocrat, small-holder and agitator are in no way relegated by the War. Housing reform, town planning, the spread of education, the combating of disease, the abolition of the conditions leading to prostitution and crime—oh ! I am alive to the born wanton and the wilful cut-throat—the smoothing of the path for the succeeding generation, all this is the work of grown-up men. Take heart, therefore, you unremarkable town planners and constructors of garden cities, heroic on your own plane, the peace to come will restore you to that work which equally with war is worth your doing.

Now I would ask the reader to believe that all those cosmic speculations hurled at him at the beginning of this chapter and all the declamatory nonsense which I have a good mind to turn back and erase, are not more than an attempt to prove sanity and reasonableness. Are we, at this point of suspension in Time and Space, to take our warlike squabbles to heart, or are we to continue to cultivate our gardens? Only by such cultivation, or so it seems to me, can a man preserve his soul. For his garden is his own affair, to grow in it what he will, without word of command or need of justification.

iii

But, good Lord! what have we crawlers between earth and heaven to do with justification? Poised uncertainly in Time, hardly more sure of Earth, *terra firma* as we preposterously dub her, than the bird resting in mid-ocean, are we to adopt the Bench's attitude towards our frail selves? Will not the historian's do, extenuating little, accentuating nothing? Certain it is that since we cannot control our desires it is foolish to be ashamed of them. Though we may denounce crime it is idle getting into a pet with the criminal. "You have adduced no reason why sentence of death should not be pronounced against you, but till you are hanged I shall be glad if you will dine with me" would be a judicial pronouncement saner than the ordinary. The other to accept with dignity.

It is not crime nor the criminal instinct we should be ashamed of, but folly. I should be ashamed to prefer Leader to Constable, *La Fille de Madame Angot* to *Die*

Meistersinger, Max's parody to Meredith's page, any Jingo journal to *The National Conscience*. And yet, this is not the whole gospel. There are follies for which I would go to the stake. I prefer the expression of the world to the world itself. I would rather have been Thackeray than Wellington, have described Becky's flight from Brussels than have won the battle. I would rather have written three of the four parts of *The Old Wives' Tale* than have been mayor of each of the Five Towns.

The idea of

Tame and shabby tigers,

dusty prisoners of the travelling menagerie, pleases me more than the salving of whole companies of martyrs. I would rather have invented the infamous boots of the *apache*, the degenerate uppers, the equivocal toe-piece, the effeminate sole, than have been responsible for the Code Napoléon. I would rather have found the majestie close :

Tout droit dans son armure, un grand homme de pierre
Se tenait à la barre et coupait le flot noir ;
Mais le calme héros, courbé sur sa rapière,
Regardait le sillage et ne daignait rien voir.

than have run the gamut of the Don's escapades.

I scribble a line or two on the small scraps of paper doled out grudgingly by the Sister, "so that you can't worrit yourself even if you want to," and while away the time compiling lists of past delights. Catalogues of Whitmanesque sincerity, in no way a pose.

An old park in our middle England, dripping trees, undergrowth, decay, a lady many years disconsolate ;

bleak, pinched moors and winding roads; old inns, coffee-rooms and faded prints; high noon in market-squares, the roguery of dealers, Hodge's reverence to parson and bank manager; all that England which lies between Hogarth and Trollope; the placidity which is content with Rydal Water and the glory of Wordsworth; the eaves and thatches of Hertfordshire; Surrey's imitation of Corot; the apple-sense of Somerset; the mothy coombes of Devon. And then the reflex sentimentality of these direct emotions and the play Stevenson would have made of them; the Wardour Street glamour of such words as *sun-dial* and *curfew*, the Victorian lilt and cadence of that perfect *rasseur* King Arthur; the saturated melancholy of headstones. The sentimentality of parchments; old brocades, fans that have not fluttered and lace that has not stirred for a generation; the *mouches* and petulance of *petites marquises*; the painter's sense of great ladies.

I could tease myself that these emotions are so general as not to be worth the setting down, were it not that strong affection loses nothing by being shared with the whole world. Sealing-wax and sailing-ships fascinate me none the less for having appealed to another. Yet there are certain intimate appreciations, discoveries of one's own, to be hugged exultingly. Such the homely lilt of ballads, the crinolined grace of *She Wore a Wreath of Roses*, the faded propriety of *My Mother Bids Me Bind my Hair*. I sometimes think they have missed the better half of life who do not know Claribel, stern mistress of our tender youth, inexorable guide to wayward fingers. Well do I remember the tone of ivory keys deepening through

saffron to rich brown, the nubbly, polished ebonies, the puckered rose-coloured silk lining, the fretted walnut front, the fantastic scroll-work of the maker's name. Collard and Collard—how many hours did my childish soul ponder over all the possible combinations of father and son, uncle and nephew, brothers it may be. I often find myself wondering what has become of the old piano over which half my childhood was wept away. I believe I should know it again by its fragrance, the fragrance of my mother's fingers. As I write the perfume steals across me.

I adore all acting, all masks and subterfuges, all cloaks and garbs of respectability, the obsequiousness of head waiters and the civility of underlings, all rogues and vagabonds soever, the leer of the pavement and the wit of the gutter. I love Bond Street at eleven in the morning, Scott's at noon, some *matinée* at which there shall be question of faded emotion—say, the old retainer's. And then sunset red as a guardsman's tunic gilding the front of the westward-going 'bus, a music-hall, enough money in my pocket to pay the small-hours' supper-bill, the lights extinguished and by the butt of a glowing cigar, a last florin for its fellow, a last sixpence for human débris insistent with pitiful whine. I love the mystery and peril of the streets. I love to lie lazily in London, to loop my curtains and surrender myself to the hypnotic effect of the one hundred and sixty-three stags and two thousand, two hundred and eighty-two hounds in full cry which I must presume to have been my landlord's taste in wall-paper some lustres ago. I like to gaze at framed elevens and fifteens, at the jumble of racquets and clubs, the jowl of a prize-fighter, Vardon at the top

of his swing, Miss Letty Lind ineffably graceful in some Chinese fantasy. I like to look down on Regent Street—my rooms are at the top of a nest of actors' clubs, registry offices, shady money-lenders and still shadier solicitors—and watch the late last loiterer. I love to lie and think of the world as my own, my very own, in which, though I earn a living by rule and in tune with the common whim, I may by the grace of God think what I like and choose the friends who shall make me laugh and the books which shall make me cry. Every man leads a double life in this most precious of senses. In this world of my own I am supreme lord and master and may shatter and rebuild according to my proper desire. Events in the tangible universe do not as events interest me at all. Kings may die and Empires fade away, but until these happenings are presented in some saturated phrase my consciousness is unaffected. A new planet is of less moment to me than a new reading of an old line. It needed the Shakespearean echo of some journalist's "Now is England to be tested to her very marrow" to move me to the full responsibility of our pledge to Belgium.

I love the vanity of artists stretching their sad fastidiousness on the rack till perfection be found; the martyr's egotism which will sacrifice health and life itself, not that we may read but that he may write. So the pride of the soldier caring less for the cause than that he shall die worthily. I love words for their own sake. I love the words "hyacinth," "narcissus," "daffodil," "dog-rose"; their very look on the page enchants me; they smell more sweetly in the writer's garden than in Nature's rank parterre.

I have never seen a trumpet-orchid, yet I know that when I read :

Fly forward, O my heart, from the Foreland to the Start—
We're steaming all too slow,
And it's twenty thousand mile to our little lazy isle
Where the trumpet-orchids blow.

the word conjures up the nostalgia of far-off seas. I love the tinkle of "onyx," "chalcedony," "beryl," more than the trumpety gauds themselves. I love the word "must-stained" without desire to gaze upon the feet of the treader of grapes; the words "spikenard" and "alabaster" without longing for pot or jar. I am crazy for "jasmine" and for "jade," and were I a French writer you would find *jadis* on every page. I would give the million I do not possess to flaunt a scutcheon with the device *Désormais!* But if I am in love with words, it must not be supposed that I have no affection for the idea also. Though I would insist that the idea shall emerge from the foam and tumble of its wrappings glorious as any goddess from the sea, yet do I not disdain to disentangle the writer from his own emmeshings, to lie in wait for him, to detect him in his style. I like to hear in the slipshod cadence of Dickens the beating of his great untidy heart; to trace in the lowering of beautiful words to unromantic purpose the infinite common-sense of his latter-day successor; to nose the corruption of the decadent in the paint and powder of his prose. Words for me are not the grace-notes of existence but the very stuff and texture of life. This may be madness, but it is an honest frenzy, and remember that in your own kingdom you have the right to be mad. I like to think of

Piccadilly as it must have been in those early days which saw me mewed up in our provinces of sterling worth. Of the *coudoiment* of notabilities. Of the days when Ellen Terry brought a new morning to the jaded world and Irving sent us shuddering to bed; when, touchingly, at eleven-thirty, Mr and Mrs Kendal would make it up again. When Mr Beerbohm Tree was a rising young actor and Mr George Moore confesses he was young. When those tremendous initials, G.B.S., first growled and thundered in the pages of *The Saturday Review*, Wilde had not tired of confounding peacockery with prose, and the giant Wells was stirring in his sleep. When Rudyard Kipling was a power in the land, Lord Rosebery a Liberal-Imperialist hope, and it seemed as though the Prince would never be King.

iv

I am a good lover, but an even better hater. I have an unparalleled zest for the most moderate of dislikes. I dislike—to put it no more strongly—a great many women and nearly all men, with a special aversion for the type of man adored by women, mineing-mouthed, luxuriant-polled, *genre coiffeur*. I dislike the purist who claims that one language should be enough for any writer and secretly begrudges Cæsar his dying Latinism; and I dislike all those honest folk who insist upon taking you at the foot of the letter instead of at the top, or at least half-way down. I dislike all aldermen, mayors, beadles, janitors, pew-openers, the whole bag of officialdom; all sham repentances and most sincere ones; all those to whom the night brings counsel; the *oncle à succession* and the pliant inheritor; the

little ninny who insists that the *Moonlight Sonata* is by Mendelssohn. I have a contempt for the Christian who looks down upon the Jew, the white man who animadverts against the black. I have a horror of the Freemason in his cups; of the players of solo-whist; of the actor with pretensions towards edification claiming to rattle his face that ultimately fewer women may rattle theirs, who "asks a blessing" on his Hamlet. I hate the commonplaces of the train, the street and the market. I abhor the belly of the successful man and the swelling paunch of the Justice. I am out of patience with that sentimental midwifery which regards marriage as an infallible inoculation against light desire. I detest Shakespeare's Isabella, all maids who place too high a value on their chastity and all harlots who sell theirs. But my particular loathing is reserved for the unknowledgeable fool who says in his heart: "These things are not within my experience; therefore they cannot be true."

v

Lying between like and dislike is the fascinating region of reconciliation. There are many things in life that I want to reconcile.

The tragedies of doting fathers and renegade sons, of mothers who live for their children and children who live for themselves; the wisdom of elders and the banality of their phrase; the undeniability and tediousness of old fools; the wrong-headedness of the grocer's view of art and his well-placed distrust of the artist; the amusingness of people and their harmfulness; the vigour and beauty of the Bible and the

rusticity of its writers ; the philosophic acceptance of a First Cause as inconstant as the telephone and the strong inclination to say one's prayers ; the faculty to cope with Kant and the childlike aptitude for faith ; the sheepishness of the Shakespearean mask and the sublimity of the poet ; the greatness of Queen Elizabeth and the pretentiousness of her virginity ; the grace of Charles the Martyr and his unending folly ; the greasy corpulence of Gautier and the perfection of his verse ; the divine murmur of Verlaine and the cretin's mentality.

I want to reconcile the generosity and the greed of harlots ; my own rare moments of appreciation, when words are too gross to serve, and the physical peacetime habit, half sporting-tipster, half bookmaker's tout, bluff, Homburg-hatted, Edwardian ; all envelopes with their contents, all wrappings with their spirit.

Then come the things I want to know, millions of them.

I want to know which is the more pitiful, a calculating head on young shoulders or an old man wearing gravewards with spirit undimmed ; why priests are snuffy in habit, and the established clergy apt to confound the Oxford manner with the Christian ; why dissent is unfashionable ; the relation of academies to their parent arts ; whether your middle-class hostess would not prefer at her dinner-table a financier batten- ing upon widows and orphans to a woman " without her lines."

But more than all these and last of all, at least last in the categorical vein, I want to know why mediocre self-seeking, indifferent cowardice and half-hearted meanness should be the pillars of provincial

society. In the Metropolis blackguardism is at least downright and frank. Cloak these tempered and provincial vices with a moderate standing, a tolerable income, a sufficiently old-fashioned brougham—a livery of discretion in a word—and you have the provincial backbone. Your tatterdemalion and arch-scoundrel are equally insecure; it is your petty prosperer who creeps through life immune, crawls at the last to his unremarkable grave. I speak here of the small employer, the good easy man who cracks a tolerable joke at his club and is facetious in the train. I speak of my uncle. My intention is to portray him as he was, to set him forth with scrupulous fairness, to display in the best of lights his ostentatious goodness and egregious *bonhomie*. . . . But all in good time and everything in its place; I have not yet emptied my sack of inquisitiveness.

There are so many other things knowledge of which I most urgently desire, things not to be found in tables of velocities and masses. I have never been able to grasp the scientific side of learning and am ignorant of the simplest natural phenomena, the way it pleases the moon to shine and the tides to ebb and flow. Do I desire to go a-courting I can, by looking in the almanack, find out moonshine. Do I want to play cricket on the sands—sole occasion on which the tides concern me—is there not always a little wooden shrine with a clock-face and the legend “High Water at ”? I have never met the schoolmaster who could explain a logarithm in its quiddity or define the relations of sine and cosine. I take it on trust that two and two make four, and am content in the knowledge that when I happen to have money lying in a bank the clerk,

with the help of King's Interest Tables, will be able to tell me how much I may draw. All these things are to me part of the knowledge which is no knowledge. But I do very desperately want to know the meaning of the two-page cipher in Balzac's *La Physiologie du Mariage*; whether in Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale* Madame Arnoux would have yielded at the last; why French writers are incapable of quoting English correctly; why it is impossible to procure in any French bookshop Monnier's portrait of the delectable *Prudhomme*; why our allies offer whisky as an *apéritif* with sugared water and a teaspoon; when Frenchmen will cease to pose for their beards. Then again, I intend to have it out with the brilliant author of *The Old Wives' Tale*; to ask him why to the impeccable first, second and fourth parts he must needs add that improbable third. What would you imagine a Frenchman to be like? is the poser set to the benighted Five-Townsmen, and pat comes the answer: Chirac, dapper, courtly, Leechified! Seen through the Povey spectacles Paris looks pale! This, if I mistake not, is my third reference to a wonderful book, and I hold out no promise that it shall be my last. I do not see why I should debar myself from paying tribute as often as the fancy takes me.

vi

What a plague is *ennui*! To have been everywhere, seen everything, done everything, to have used up the senses and let slip the supreme boon is of all moral diseases the last incurable. To be tired of oneself and one's proficiencies, of the feel of a cue, the whip of a

club, the way the racquet comes up in the hand, the touch of reins, the "handle" of your favourite book, all this is indeed to find the world flat and unprofitable. Nothing remains says your quack but to take his pills. Nothing remains but to follow my system of exercises, declares some frock-coated Hercules.

There is, we have often been told, valour and to spare in the spirit's triumph over the flesh. But there is ignominy, I take it, in a romantic spleen giving way to massage, in a fine frenzy of melancholy yielding before a system of exercises. I know nothing more humiliating than this o'ererowing of the spirit by the body. Hamlet himself had done less girding at the world if he had not been, as Gertrude remarks, in poor condition. That the world is out of joint is an old cry. It belongs to our day to advertise all that loss of figure and excess of flesh, baldness and superfluous hair, tuberculosis, hæmorrhoids, impotence, *vices du sang*, *maladies secrètes*, which are our inheritance. I have never been able to fathom the delicate arts' survival of these natural shocks. Greatly in their favour has been the lateness of the world's discovery of electricity, X-rays, Swedish drill and physical exercises. A Musset the picture of rude health, a Chopin who should dedicate a nocturne to Mr Sandow, a Shelley *père de famille*, a Baudelaire who should be an inside right to be reckoned with—these were unthinkable. But it is no part of the story-teller's business to argue, especially when he is not too sure of his case, and you could shatter mine by citing the admirable boxer who is responsible for *Pelléas and Mélisande*.

What I am driving at is that life is never as exquisite nor as tragic as it appears on the surface. I am plagued

with a keen appreciation of the tendency of things to find their own level, and I see the world through common-sense spectacles. With me the exquisite moment is of short duration; subsidence is always at hand. Grief is tragic, but its expression, except in the hands of the trained actor, grotesque. A woman in tears is the most monstrous of spectacles, birth as lamentable as death, the terror of many an honest execution marred by the vulgarity of the hangman and our vision of the glass which is to refresh him. What, we ask, remains for the fellow in the evening of his days save the decline to some bar-parlour? Life is always taking the edge off things, and it is become the fashion to scoff at the monster and the grand *detraqué*. One laughs them out of existence, poor souls. Life is reasonable and sane; your true realist will have nothing to do with *bravura*. Life is exactly like a common-sensical novel by—never mind whom—and I fear sometimes lest the Ultimate Cause be made after that author's image. And yet the most modern writers have their cowardices. Which of them dares portray a murderer *bored* with the imbecile chunnerings, the senile irrelevancies of his judge? Which of them will attribute the clear eye and healthy appetite of the released convict less to the joy of freedom than to a régime of regular hours and enforced abstinences? They are afraid of their readers, and rightly. What reader would tolerate that I should set down my real feelings on nearing discharge? From me is expected relief from the intermittent panic, the perpetual dread, the nameless horror, whereas all I have to tell is of escape from an ecstasy of boredom. The truth is that even fear cannot endure for ever; the human mechanism

has its limits. Soldiers have told of the power at the long last to put fear behind, not that desperate fear which is the moment of valour's catch in the throat, but the more serious dread, the dull foreboding of inaction. Man cannot keep his mind for ever on the rack; God is to be thanked that we have not complete control of our mentality. I have to reason myself to consciousness of the great deeds which are afoot; I have come to feel intuitively that death is cheapening and that it has become a little thing to die.

A little thing in one sense, how tremendous in another! My reverence for the common soldier exceeds all bounds. Even more vital than the compulsion to mete out to hellish torturers the measure they meted out to their helpless victims is the obligation of this country to see that no common soldier who has served in France shall ever know the meaning of want. It is for the nation to adopt its cripples and its maimed, to exact from the poor man his contribution of work and from the rich man even to one hundred per cent. of that which he hath, rather than that a single one of these uncomplaining brave should starve. Yesterday a man died in my ward, a man whom in ordinary times one would have dismissed as a drunkard and a lecherer. I am not content with these old classifications; I am not content with a future life for this soldier which shall be all Michael Angelo and Sebastian Bach. There must be a paradise for the simpletons as for picked spirits. I am not content with a roll-call of the illustrious dead who shall arise to greet the coming of our latter-day heroes—great Edward and great Harry, the swingeing Elizabethan blade, business-like Roundhead and inefficient Cavalier. Marlborough, Wellington,

Napier, Nicholson, Havelock, Gordon—the shining list does not suffice. I am not content though Nelson return a millionfold the kiss he received from Hardy. I want a Valhalla which shall not be a palace but a home. I think I could trust Lamb to make a sufficient welcome, though it is to Falstaff I should look to discourse of honour in a strain bearable to soldier ears. Nectar and ambrosia may be good taking but there must be familiar grog and laughter and good-fellowship. I want a heaven in which horses shall be run, and the laying of odds allowed a sinless occupation. I want to see Sayers and Heenan fight it out again, to roar at Dan Leno, to watch old Grace till the shadows grow long.

The most bizarre conceptions assail me. I do not despair of finding a good terrier, a sufficiency of rats and an unoccupied corner of the marble floor. I want not only the best the celestial architects may contrive in the way of saloons but I want the atmosphere of bar parlours; I want pipes of clay and pint-pots of jasper, common briars and spittoons of jade. Out of doors, playing-fields with well-matched teams, keen-eyed umpires, hysterical supporters and tapering goal-posts—chrysoprase if you insist, but common deal will do—and a feeling that once a week it will be Saturday afternoon.

I remember reading in some exquisite diary of the war this letter of a soldier :

DEAR MUM, AND DAD, AND LOVING SISTERS ROSE, MABEL AND OUR GLADYS,—I am very pleased to write you another welcome letter as this leaves me at present. Dear Mum and Dad and loving sisters, keep the home-fires burning. Not arf! The boys are in the pink.

Not arf! Dear loving sisters, Rose, Mabel and our Gladys, keep merry and bright. Not arf!

I place this amongst the most pathetic and most beautiful of the world's letters. It brings tears, and the refrain "Rose, Mabel and our Gladys" has the plaintiveness of a litany.

I want a heaven for this writer that shall please him.

vii

It is not often that writers avow even to themselves the extent to which their own souls enter into their projections. Whereas we have in this migration the key to all that matters, to all that is intent and purpose apart from the mere bricks and mortar of the story. That wit was perfectly right who said that authors do not hire steam-engines to write their books for them. Autobiographical fiction is the more pardonable, it seems to me, the firm decision taken that it shall be the author's last essay. I am determined that this shall be so in the present case. One cannot go on adding postscripts for ever. I have written nine books in all, five in my own name that were books indeed, the other four the world-famous *Pig-Pig!* series, of which the authorship stands here first revealed. I challenge any reader of this page to declare a previous inkling that the great, glorious and altogether wonderful *Mr Pig-Pig!* was the creation of Edward Marston.

It saddens me to take down my five volumes from their melancholy shelf. I had long ago ceased to handle them were it not that type and paper, nay the very matter itself, are the better for an airing. The

page mellows with human contact. I am tired of the pride of print, the bricklayer's content in the hundred thousand words piled one upon another. I have outlived even the artist's pride of craftsmanship, the conjurer's delight in manipulation and the perfect illusion. There was a time when I would turn to any page in *Truth and Untruth*, and say: "Yes, I meant that, not a hair's-breadth more, not a shade less, *just* that." Perhaps I have mastered this pride rather than outlived it. It is not well to hug one's talent—I use the word for want of a humbler—entirely to oneself. And none of my five books enabled me to share mine with more than eight hundred readers apiece, to judge from the returns punctually rendered by my four publishers, of whom one only braved the maxim as to the precautions to be taken being once bitten. They absorbed nine precious years, did these strenuous five, and my net "takings" amounted to less than one hundred pounds. I have dealt on all possible bases, royalty, sale outright, percentage of profit, with risk and even with certainty of loss. Strange to say, it was my co-partners in this last adventure, a high-class, historic, chivalrous house, "tainted with literature" as their pushing competitors dubbed them, who consented to look at me a second time. "Remember," said the senior partner with old-fashioned courtesy, "remember that we have a tradition. We bought tooth-powder for Byron! We don't drop a man because he doesn't pay in the first five minutes."

What I wanted was not income but appreciation for my books; not so much the reviewer's stuff, for the chilliness of which I was prepared, but the compensating letters from unknown readers. Perhaps I

did want to be noticed by the big men. That it is better playing with a lion's whelp than with an old one dying is not true of the young writer. Better to be fretfully roared out of existence than indifferently patronised by the jackal. Twice only have I figured over the coveted, tremendous initials; for the young writer has first to win his spurs, and it would seem that these are in the bestowal of the critical apprentice. *Truth and Untruth* was pronounced by one young gentleman to bear a marked resemblance to Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*. True that I had never cast eyes upon that work; the proofs of pilfering were irrefutable. Another bright sprig claimed that my book was "coloured with Neoplatonism," of which wild-fowl I knew less than nothing. Followed a disquisition upon schools, to my mind the least profitable form of raking among old bones. I know nothing about such classifications and care less. To me Zola is a romantic for the reason that his story of the old wife keeping her weather-eye open against a husband's attempts to poison her gives me as authentic a thrill as any tale of treasure. I call Stevenson a great realist, since he makes me feel nearer to the unutterable Huish than I do to the hero of *L'Assommoir*. I have always found that the assorters and classifiers, the pedants and the schoolmasters, the entire professorial brood in a word, are as ignorant of the spirit as they are apt with the letter. I belong to no school. When I am in the mood Hugo is superb; according as the wind blows Mr Henry James is our greatest writer or the sheer unreadable. I own no master and am not vain enough to dream of disciples. In the same breath I have been praised for fastidiousness and blamed for slovenly

workmanship and skimped design. God ! when I think that I built my books as reverently as a cathedral and laid their foundations with as monumental a care. I would not have the reader imagine that this is the mere fretfulness of failure. I can suffer failure. And yet it rankles when I see praise bestowed on the slipshod journeyman unintrigued by his art.

In cold blood I am inclined to think my books not so very remarkable. At times I fear lest they wear too closely the air of the masterpieces . . . of others ! There are moods in which *The Porcelain Dome* seems to be *Mademoiselle de Maupin* all over again without, shamefaced islander that I am, the preoccupation of sex. It has the enamelled sky, the Berlin-wool sunsets, the swansdown clouds. *White Wings* is a rhapsody of the enskied and sainted, but isn't there in the title a hint, the smallest possible hint, of Miss Charlotte M. Yonge ? *Agnes* is a sympathetic study of the prostitute, owing something to *La Fille Elisa* and to *Marthe*. This, the first book of mine to be reviewed over formidable initials, I had named without reckoning on the reviewer's cruel wit and the music-hall's foremost roysterer. Never shall I forget that Saturday afternoon when, opening with trembling fingers the historic journal, I saw my book bleeding under the headline : " I'm ashamed of you, Ag-er-ness ! "

For my fifth work I determined to leave no stone unturned to draw the public attention. For excuse let me say that I am naturally impatient and that posterity is a long way off. I made things easy for the reader. I divided the story into books with distinctive titles not hard to remember, and each book into chapters with enticing headings. Each page bore at the top an

infantile indication of its contents in words of one syllable. The volume was prefaced with a key-quotation in *English*. I chose a firm of publishers renowned for their lack of squeamishness, and took advantage of a momentary lull in their flood of unsavoury memoirs. I connived at the suggestion that the MS. had come mysteriously into their hands. I let it be understood that the characters were fashioned "like Pharaoh's soldiers in the reechy painting." For a month I arranged for paragraphis in the leading society journals beginning: "A little bird tells us . . ." and "It is whispered that . . ." And then the authorship of the impending publication, which those who had been "privileged to see in manuscript" pronounced to be "startling," was allowed to leak out. I was interviewed by camera, "Getting into the Mercedes," "Taking Bully for his Walk"—two guineas the hire of the brute cost me—"Chuckling over *Punch's* Review of his Last Novel," "Subscribing to the Children's Sea-Side Fund." I regretted my celibacy, the non-existence of a wife who might also be photographed "Getting into the Napier," "Teaching Fido to Beg," "Tell me, Nurse, how is Baby?" "As Cleopatra at the Albert Hall." There was no baseness to which I did not descend. I altered the title from *The Middling Venture*, which the publishers thought smacked too dangerously of Henry James, to *Plum-Tree and Amber, or The Satirical Rogue*, the one hint of quality in all the welter of paragraphing. And in this guise I gave to the world the most careful, the most sincere and the most temperate work of which I am capable. "Betrays a plentiful lack of wit," thundered the tremendous initials. "This author, like the crab, goes backward."

The book did not even sell. I was an accredited failure.

Now let me be quite clear upon this matter of failure. I am prepared to believe that the books were not masterpieces. In the long run work of genius is never allowed to die, and that my books are dead proves that they had no claim to the supreme category. That they had more labour spent on them than genius, so often careless, demands ; that they were conceived in agony and brought forth after bloody travail is beside the point. They are a part of my life which I have left definitely behind ; I can laugh at old bitterness, and besides, have I not *Pig-Pig!* to console me ?

The reader will remember him well ; he came a year or two after *Trilby* had exhausted her vogue. The hoardings were alive with him ; he crowded all other literature off the railway bookstalls. He was to be met with in 'buses and in trains, in drawing-rooms, in seaside lodging-houses and on the beach. The circulating library displayed cards : *Mr Pig-Pig is OUT*, by which they implied the feverish wetting of a hundred thumbs. A witty judge began his summing up in a *cause célèbre* with the words : "Gentlemen of the Jury, this case is not unique, but it possesses what Mr Pig-Pig would call unquosity." The reader will remember the charming personality portrayed on the covers of the four volumes, in countless toys, trinkets, charms, on chocolate boxes and on tins of boot polish. He will remember the white-topped, morning-coated, monocled little porker, with a huge "Flor de Pig-Pig" cigar at the corner of his gentlemanly mouth. Four shillings and sixpence to the public, the little man brought me in twenty thousand pounds. And then there were the

cheap editions. Twopence a copy is not much, but it mounts up, dear reader, it mounts up. I have never been able to account for the book's popularity. It was Swift without the savagery and Sterne without the wit. It represented the youth of this country growing through stuttering nonage to the maturity of silent strength, silent because it has nothing to say. Plain *Mr Pig-Pig!* was the title of the first volume. *Pig-Pig Goes One Better!*—I had artfully dropped the "Mr"—was the second. Then *Pig-Pig en Voyage!*—the French tickled 'em immensely—and finally *Pig-Pig Settles Up and Down!* And of course there were the subdivisions. *Pig-Pig and the Tender Passion!* *Pig-Pig and Nemesis!* *Pig-Pig Counts the Cost!* I tell you I let myself go.

I have often pondered over the possibility of genius writing masterpieces with one hand and pot-boilers with the other. But the degradation is too abject. Far better to write your rubbish before you are thirty-five and retire on your dishonest competence. God grant you the power to keep your genius unsullied and a reasonable stretch of life for the work you were born to do. Or you may address envelopes from six to six, keeping the night for the masterpiece, though I am told this is bad for the health. Yet another way is to carry coals, or lay drains, till the week's pittance is assured. In my own case I reversed the process and did my good work first, but it is true that I had a capital of between seventeen and eighteen thousand pounds. I have written of the sovereign influence of health; I was wrong. Health is important, but you can manage with a modicum of it. Wealth is all that matters. I am amused to read in naturalistic novels the most intimate particularities of the hero's vices, manners,

ways of eating, drinking and loving, but no mention of his income. Your true realist is he who will give you not only the grandest and the meanest sentiments of which his characters are capable, but also the exact fortune *and how secured* which will permit them the leisure for their philosophic airings. He will keep accounts for his personages. He will not send a younger son to the Colonies without putting money in his purse, at least to the extent of the fare. He will indicate in what way the impending bankrupt is to stave off final disaster, precisising exactly where the ready money, that most crucial factor, comes from. He will instruct the novice in the ticklish game as to how, having divested himself of all his worldly goods even to the classic gold hunter and Albert chain, he may expect to live through the interminable days of the law's firking and ferreting. In any strictly non-Gilbertian country the maintenance of bankrupts under examination would be a charge upon the State, instead of which we tacitly assume them to keep breath going upon the secret stores of which it is a criminal offence to have made provision. Let me say that I have never made the acquaintance of the Official Receiver outside the columns of the newspaper. I have always enjoyed a fair, even good income. To-day I still possess my seventeen or eighteen thousand pounds and all that the *Pig-Pig!* series brought me in. I thank God for my son's sake.

viii

Sister is uneasy about my writing.

"Here, you," she said one day, "you're always scribbling. Can't you leave it alone and do a bit of

reading instead. Here's something for you to look at." Whereupon she put into my hand a copy of a journal which is accustomed to print weekly for the benefit of such classes as acknowledge themselves as "lower" sixteen pages of the wit and tales of our grandfathers. All for the war-time price of three-halfpence. How do they manage it one asks wearily, and as wearily makes a guess at the advertisements. Let me reproduce one which has given me the genuine thrill, the thrill that none but your true enormity affords.

Here faintness overtakes me. What if this treasur'd splendour and holy grail, this collector's jimp inanity be appraised too carelessly by the taster in these trifles? I am sure of my bouquet, but would be sure of the critical nose. Ineffably "the goods," the thing since Sister put it into my hands haunts me, is become an obsession. *Choice* and fascinating excerpt . . . mesmeric rhythm . . . Milton's masterpiece. . . . I have not been so thrilled since the day I saw in an undertaker's window the promise—Pinking Done. I will be faint no longer. Roses have thorns and silver fountains mud, says the poet, but I say that canker is undiscoverable in the sweet bud of this my beauty's rose. Let loveliness speak for herself.

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rit. p rall. a tempo.

dim. etc.,

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Who was the exorbitant fellow who looked to crimson velvet to outweigh the miseries of existence ? Or was it yellow plush ? In either case he asked too much. There is that in my simple advertisement which fills the cup of joy to overflowing. Henceforth I am content to absent me from felicity.

Try it on *your* piano.

CHAPTER I

§ i

AND now at length I am come to my uncle.

The reader would have been afforded earlier acquaintance with this personage had it not been for the pains I have been at to find the word that shall fit him. I wanted something at once grotesque and sinister, something that would bring to the mind Pantagruel and our modern buffoon. Loon, pantaloon—the termination was found but not the body. That was to be dwarfish, having to do with bottle-imps, djinns and leprechauns in so far as these little people are malevolent. Enormity, in the social sense, had to be implied. The word existed in the French and only my natural objection to sponging on the foreigner prevented me from hurling it at the reader at the outset. Peacocking in alien feathers is always displeasing, pardonable only when native plumes are inadequate—to taste the full measure of offensiveness you have only to read any Frenchman presuming to borrow from us. I hope I shall never use a foreign word where there is an English equivalent; but that equivalent lacking I account myself entitled to ransack the Chinese, the Tartar, the Caribbean and whatever tongues are spoken on Roast Beef and Plum Pudding Islands. I should think nothing of inventing a language for the sole purpose of quoting from it.

And now, reader, let me present to you the little

word *cocasse*. It is a word of breeding. Says Béranger :

Pierrots et paillasses
 Beaux esprits cocasses
 Charmant sur les places
 Le peuple ébahi.

It is an accommodating word and well describes my last chapter. Confess that you did not quite grasp the appositeness of that musical interlude. 'Twas a stroke of cunning to prepare you for my uncle and for the word which should describe him.

It is time for me to be a little more precise. Reuben Ackroyd, my mother's brother, was for fifty years the leading citizen of Crawley Bridge. His cotton mill it was which had built up the prosperity of the little town on the borders of Lancashire and Cheshire. Head of the firm of Ackroyd and Marston of Crawley Bridge Mill—"Ackroyd's" was the name it went by in the town, which in turn was always called "The Bridge"—the old spider sat in his Manchester office and spun a web which included Stockport, Oldham, Blackburn, Bury, and other minor towns of the county. His machinations were concerned with nothing more sinister than cotton piece goods. Ackroyd and Marston's Crawley Shirting is still a name to conjure with in Calcutta, to impress the *rasta* of Buenos Ayres, to stir China from her sleep of ages. It was an honest cloth. But it is to be admitted that besides the Crawley shirting, Ackroyd and Marston manufactured velveteens in which there was no velvet, sateens devoid of satin, and flannelettes innocent of wool. But since all these deceptions were "patent to the meanest intelligence"—a favourite phrase with my uncle—the trade may be

considered susceptible of a normal commercial honesty. I have in my possession a copy of the pamphlet in which Reuben warned the mothers of England of the highly inflammable nature of cotton flannelettes and the danger to which were exposed such of their darlings as were "knickered and nightied"—he sat up a whole night over the phrase—in the treacherous stuff. The final paragraph contained a warranty that all Ackroyd and Marston's flannelettes were subjected to a process rendering them fireproof to a superlative degree. The whole rounded off with a clever drawing, showing a six-year-old innocent applying a match to her frock, with the text : IT WON'T LIGHT.

A gaunt, twisted man my uncle must have been, stripped for the last voyage. But it is not decent to spy upon people so, and the world is right to take us at the more charitable estimate of our chosen wrappings. Let me describe him in his normal garb, that outward husk which for a generation imposed upon the whole world with the exception of half-a-dozen confidential employees. My uncle affected a hard hat with a square top bulging slightly at the crown as though in sympathy with the dome beneath. This bulge held the faintest suggestion of the Established Church, which was quickly corrected by the brim, puritan and friendly in the technical sense. The wings of the collar were spread wide as charity. Beneath them a cravat broad as the wearer's convictions but tied as tightly as his purse-strings on anonymous occasion ; in the cravat an enormous single diamond of the first water, symbolical of the purity of its wearer's intentions. The sober coat was a compromise between the dignity of the ceremonial garment and the workman's

blouse ; I am worn, it seemed to say, by a labourer worthy of his hire. The waistcoat was unremarkable save that it was tight-stretched over protuberance, a paunch lacking to the discerning the generosity of true ventripotence. He had no joy in his stomach. Never could it have grown from the joyous little skinful, tight as a drum, in which young Tom Brown stowed away kidneys and coffee, nor yet from the rice-stuffed abundance of the little fellow in the plate illustrative of the Crocodile in Cuvier's *Natural History*. Rather did my uncle seem to view it as an inculpatory index to greed. To me it was always a hard, round nodule of rapacity. Brother merchants, his contemporaries, were wont in summer-time to array themselves in waistcoats of light hue and texture. Not so Reuben. He would not "bedizen" himself nor allow his employees to be so bedizened. "We are here for a Purpose," he would say, speaking in capitals, "and that Purpose is not advanced by Unseemliness in Dress. We are not going BOATING," he would explode. "Business is Business and Boating is Boating. We have to guide our Bark down the Stream of Commerce till we reach the Shore of Independence, and then we may Guy ourselves each according to his Taste and Fancy." My uncle's trousers were shapeless, cylindrical affairs hanging in multiple folds over stout, well-made boots. Never did I see him—here, reader, is the note of the *cocasse*—without a flower carried as soon as the contrivance was invented in a little tin water-bottle fitting into the buttonhole. He would bestow these roses of his own growing with a lavish hand ; in the first instance upon the hospital where was the Ackroyd ward, next upon his workpeople, more particularly

upon any employee who had been refused a^rise of wages. We bring proof, the red and yellow blooms implied, of our master's regret in not being able to see his way—oh classic formula!—to grant your moderate request; are we not evidence that, frankly, he bears his petitioners no ill-will. Fine Saturdays would see old Reuben at the county cricket ground, surmounted by an incredible circlet of straw, a jovial old dog glad to let others have their day. From May to October he was effulgent, genial, and on occasion lenient with slow-paying customers; with the first chill the whole man retired within the folds of his tight-buttoned ulster, and something crab-like crept into his walk.

I find that I have described the clothes rather than the man, and this largely because clothes are unchanging whereas man cannot defy Time for ever. And yet, except that my uncle's hair grew whiter and his figure more bent, and that he wore a deeper air of intimacy with the ultimate purpose of Almighty God, I cannot recall that his aspect ever underwent any real change. He was slightly over the middle height and possessed a brow which, on public platforms and with top-lighting, veered to nobility. He always seemed to me—I am no politician—the typical free trader, 'cute, canny and close-fisted. His glowing periods were those Cobden could make impressive, and he was never tired of reiterating the old tag about riches consisting not in the multitude of man's possessions but in the fewness of his wants. When giving vent to a well-chosen sentiment he was exactly like any one of the fifty or sixty benevolent old buffers who appear to have mitigated the rigours of the cotton famine by sitting for their portraits round an oak table. Yet there were times

when his features in repose assumed an expression veritably hang-dog. His nose, broad enough at the base to support gold spectacles, sharpened to meanness at the end; the mouth one instinctively felt to be cruel and the chin weak, although both were screened by a straggling, undecided beard. He had a curious trick of speaking out of the left half of his mouth, the underlip drooping to let forth such speech as might be considered non-committal and then going back with a snap.

His word was as good as his bond, but it was his invariable practice after having given a verbal undertaking to reduce that undertaking to writing, and many people were surprised at the astonishing wealth of contingencies, forfeits and alternative interpretations a simple yea or nay may be presumed to give rise to. These written engagements, drawn up in his neat, precise handwriting, were to him æsthetic achievements and matter for artistic pride. He would safeguard the interests of the second party to the treaty with great elaboration, setting out innumerable pains and penalties to which in no case could that unfortunate person have been exposed; and when trouble arose it was invariably found to hang upon the interpretation of some trifling accident of phrasing, a misplaced "and" or ill-considered "but." I have marvelled for hours together over the skill and cunning of these booby-traps. To this day I am not sure how far they were deliberate schemes to involve less subtle intelligences, or how far they may have been the expression of an idea of truth as tortured and intricate as the late Mr Gladstone's oratorical expositions of that virtue. My uncle looked well on the Bench and carried many a Company Meeting by his impressive silences.

You are to hear of him at considerable length in the following pages, for although my story has no hero it is not without a villain. And yet I am not sure that villain's the word. He was a devoted husband and an admirable father, though I do not know to what violations a dividend warrant might not have tempted him. Though I have seen him play at ride-a-cock-horse with his children I swear that for a director's fee he would have fumbled in the breasts of virgins. Meets it is I set it down that a man may be an excellent father and yet a villain. At least I'm sure it was so at Crawley Bridge. He was an admirable host and could sing a good song. Many's the New Year's Eve I have sat with him and his family munching chestnuts round the fire. Then, holding up a glass of port, would he set us singing *A Boat, a Boat, and to the Ferry*, or *London Bridge is Falling Down*, and as midnight drew near lead off *John Brown's Body* with immense gusto and hilarity. To behold his cheerful countenance and to hear his strong, steady voice you would swear him incapable of making a poor wretch bankrupt, whereas this was a thing he always did with a chuckle. He seemed to derive a moral satisfaction almost amounting to physical well-being from the misfortunes of others. He was a problem of which I could never quite fit the pieces together, a problem in terms of the *cocasse*.

Cocasse, coeasse—how well you look in your English dress and how splendidly you fit the English temperament. I expect henceforth to see you in daily use.

The ambitious cleric who "receives a call" to a wealthier cure and offers up sham prayers for guidance is cocasse.

A brewer who should vote in favour of a prohibitionist bill is coeasse.

A brewer who should vote against the bill *from conviction* is coeasse.

The supposition of the United Kingdom Alliance and a few doddering bishops that the soldiers will be content to come home to a "dry" England is coeasse.

Coeasse! Coeasse!

My own life has not been lacking in the quality. Did not my best labours, the books into which I put heart and brain, peter out in mere vexation? It was not so much fame that I wanted—fame being largely a matter of luck, of one's name being easily pronounceable, of titles catching on over the tea-cups of the upper ten, of a hundred incalculable little ignominies. It was not fame I wanted, but appreciation by the few picked spirits. Well, I failed. But I had only to put my tongue in my cheek and ladle out ribaldry to be lapped up greedily and besought for more.

All my life I have had more than bowing acquaintance with the coeasse.

§ ii

Let me begin at the beginning.

All that remains to me of my childhood is the sharpest recollection of the feel and taste and smell of things; very little as to whether people were kind to me or whether I liked them or not. I remember the japanned blue of my cot-sides cut out in constellations the way I would fit my fingers into the stars, the feel of the imprint on the tips. I remember the noise the side would make when I bulged it out with my knee and released it

sharply, the taste of the brass knobs at the corners, the number of turns it took to unscrew them. Familiar still the scent of the shelves in my mother's store-cupboard, the leathery atmosphere of the piled box-room. I have all the old distaste for certain little pairs of cream socks and the new-washed discomfort of them, and for tying the black silk scarves of sailor suits. I know exactly how paving-stones smell when one is less than three feet tall, and can feel again the knee-deep thresh and churn of leaves in a hollow. The rain spinning pennies in the street still invites me to flatten a snub nose against the pane, and I can feel on each cheek the press of the window's safety bars. I know that when there is a great lowing of cattle in the early hours it must be Wednesday morning and market-day. I still find it a terrible thing to be left alone in a garden after dusk ; romantic and thrilling to light the gas at nine in the morning on days of fog ; and there is no tale written which can vie with the glamour of falling snow. I still find heaven in the scent of farm-house sheets and the glimmer of a lattice, whilst to come back after summer holidays to new carpets and new paint is to explore paradise anew. There is a grown-up theory which would derive the sensation of falling in sleep from the insecurity of legendary ancestors dwelling in tree-tops. In my maturer sleep I never fall ; I am being carried out of a steaming bathroom up flights of stairs with my head wrapped in a Paisley shawl and Dame Margery's voice declaring that I get heavier every day. Her real name was Margaret, but " Dame Margery " was, of course, inevitable.

Of my mother I recall little save the texture, colour and pattern of her dresses. I remember the visitors

used to call her "your pretty mother," and I suppose that she must have been beautiful. But I took her beauty for granted in the same way that I accepted the grandeur of an enormous gown of maroon silk flounced with ivory lace in which she went to parties. On these occasions she would wear white flowers in her beautiful hair, gold chain and locket, and on each arm a thick gold bracelet, one fastening with an admirable snap, the other with less severity. On her handkerchief I was allowed to pour a few drops—oh very, very few—of a scent called White Rose. The other perfumes of the period—Opoanax, Ylang-Ylang, Ess Bouquet, dear, delightful names—I saw only in shop windows. They were, my mother used to declare, "actressy." I dare not imagine what she would have thought of our latter-day lures—*Pluie d'Or*, *Hantise*, *Infinité*. Would she have marched with the times? I think not; I hope not. I was admitted into all the secrets of her dressing-table, innocent, obvious, motherly secrets having no greater matter for disclosure than two long tresses of hair slightly lighter in colour which Dame Margery, who had once been her nurse and was now mine, used to fasten to the drawer-knob and plait and replait. My mother's cheeks had all the glow of happiness.

"There's no recipe for a clear skin like a clear conscience," the old woman would cry with privileged freedom.

Then my mother would ask: "Will I do, Nurse?" and Margery would give a touch here and a pat there and send her downstairs with a blessing and a hundred recommendations as to shawls and wrappings, and I to trot after her in charge of fan and gloves to which

clung the delicate odour of the cedar-wood box in which she stored them, and to usher her and my father into a yellow, plush-lined cab. Respectfully the driver would touch his hat and say :

“ Grows a ’and bigger every time I sees ’im, does Mas’r Edward.”

The closing of the door would fill the house with unutterable loneliness ; I can describe it in no other way. My mother in her party clothes was the proudest and most beautiful sight my childish eyes had ever beheld, and time has not effaced the radiant vision.

Then with many promises of secrecy would Margery make coffee and crisply toast and richly butter a teacake of her own baking, and I would sit up until past ten o’clock and turn over the pictures in *David Copperfield*, which even at that early age I decided was the most beautiful book ever written. Or Dame Margery would read aloud from *Queechy* and *The Lamplighter* and make my childish heart knock at the ribs with that page from *Lillian’s Golden Hours* in which the skeleton is found in the dungeon. I had a liking too for a story called *Won by Gentleness*, which opened with a baronet called Sir Gervase—what better name for a hero?—dragged at his horse’s stirrup. All that is nearly forty years ago, but there are times when I can still feel the bump of Sir Gervase’s head upon the stones.

I may perhaps be allowed to tell here of how old Margery entered into the service of my family. My maternal grandparents had been, to look upon, as ill-assorted a pair as you would find in a day’s march ; he a bluff, cattle-dealing, northern farmer, she the primmest, littlest and most exquisite old lady that was

ever modelled in china. A poor country girl proposed herself as maid and was accepted.

“You may bring your box, girl,” said my grandmother, adding : “Of course, you understand that no followers are allowed.”

Whereupon the girl burst into tears and made stammering confession. She had, it seemed, been turned away from home and was without shelter. My grandmother, who had never known discomfiture and who never went back on a decision, rapped out tartly :

“Dry your eyes, girl. If you must have a baby, you may as well have it here. That sort of thing can’t go on in the streets.”

The news broken to my grandfather, the old gentleman slapped his thigh and roared :

“Good for you, old lady ! The wench shall have her child, damned it she shan’t, and a fine child too ! ”

And so young Margery stayed and became old Margery, and wore a wedding ring and was called Mrs Bentham, and lived and died in the service of my family universally loved and respected. Her child is now a prosperous furniture dealer in Bristol. I give the story as illustrative of the stuff of which my mother’s family was made. I must presume this to include my Unele Reuben, though for the life of me I have never been able to see how he and my mother came to be brother and sister. I do not deny that my unele would have acted in the same way ; I think he was always piqued that no such opportunity for gratuitous display of generosity ever befell him. In his heart he cared little or nothing for the proprieties, and the incident would have enabled him to lay up a prodigious capital in the way of a reputation for broad-mindedness.

Other recollections I have of my mother, but they are chiefly bound up with her dresses. I seem to see her at a garden-party at which she prettily holds a lawn-tennis racquet of old-fashioned shape. She wears a fawn-coloured frock with a short train and plum-coloured panels made out of little squares of velvet defined by gold braid. Roses cluster about her hat, and her shoulders have the pretty droop I know so well. She looks so very like the picture of a fashionable beauty of the period strolling elegantly about some royal lawn.

§ iii

I have a curious faculty amounting almost to the hypnotic for remembering people by their hands. One of my earliest recollections is that of walking behind a labourer on our way from chapel—we are a Dissenting family—on an Easter Sunday morning. I know it was Easter Sunday because the working man of those days was wont to celebrate that festival and the advent of spring with new creaking boots and trousers of bright puce. My mother held that new clothes should blazen forth on any other Sunday, but that though we might not dress more magnificently we might be allowed to eat more expensively. Lamb and a dish of asparagus were *de rigueur* on that day, afterwards to be banished from our table until Whit-Sunday when they reappeared at my uncle's board with the addition of new potatoes and green peas. Our guests at Easter were always the same—my uncle and his family, the minister and his wife, and whoever happened to be the chairman of the chapel committee with his lady. A singular procession we must have made. Consider the Rev.

and Mrs Steepleton, he sheepishly null but of good intent, she a fussy, unpretending little body. They supported life and four ailing children on a stipend—I forget at this distance of time the canting word with which we cloaked the beggarliness of the sum—of one hundred and ten pounds a year. It was an understood thing that for this wage the parson should edify his congregation twice every Sunday throughout the year with three weeks' holiday in August; and it was an equally understood thing that the middling fellow should exact respect from such of his flock as possessed less of the world's goods than he, and show proper recognition of those social gulfs which separated him from the wealthier of his congregation. I remember conceiving the impression that the Steepletons must be always hungry and that when they dined with us true politeness consisted in pressing quantities of food upon them. As the eldest of their four children was under seven years of age and as they obviously could not afford the meanest maid that chares, I often wondered how, on the occasions when they came straight to us from chapel, the little ones fared for dinner. I think now that probably they did not dine. Damnable are the straits to which the poor Dissenting minister is driven; damnable that he should be expected to give out the breath of life when he has all the trouble in the world to keep it in. Trollope's poor curate is no figment of the imagination; Hogglestock's pathetic page is sufficient title to enduring fame. But to go back to our stragglesome procession.

We paired as follows:—My unele with the parson's wife, my father with my aunt. Next the Rev. Steepleton with the wife of the chairman—a master-plumber's

lady. Behind them the master-plumber with my mother, and finally my two cousins and myself. I remember holding Monica's shy little fist, my gaze fixed on the master-plumber's hands clasped behind his back, the palms yellow, horny, ineradicably lined and exuding a natural grease.

I trace my unele's long-standing animosity towards me to that Sunday and a boy's tactless knaek of insisting upon truth. At dessert he pulled out of his pocket and held at arm's-length one of those fascinating objects, a newly minted crown piece.

"Tell Uncle Reuben what you think of him," he said. "Speak the truth, lad, and we'll see whether it is worth five shillings."

"I like you, Unele," I replied, "all but your hands," which were indeed shapely and well kept, but cruel like the claws of a bird.

I can see again the shining forehead grow red and the pendent and amiably disposed underlip go back with a snap. I can see my mother's beautiful hand go up to her bosom—she was always afraid of her brother—and hear my father's flurried apology, the chairman's hearty "That's one for Mr Reuben!" and his wife's "The boy didn't mean no 'arm, did you, luv?" My unele's brow was now as black as thunder and he put the five-shilling piece back into his pocket. Little Monica gave my hand a squeeze under the table and on the other side of me her uneouth brother, whom I already instinctively disliked, began to whistle. I remember the Rev. Steepleton striving for something tactful to say, and how the table, unable to wait until inspiration should descend, broke up in disorder. Shortly afterwards my unele, still in the highest possible

dudgeon, withdrew his family and that year's Easter Sunday came to an end.

"You shouldn't have said that, Neddy," was my father's gentle reproof. "It was very rude. You must always be careful what you say to Uncle Reuben. He never forgets when little boys are not polite."

"Reuben never forgives," said my mother. "I wish we had made Neddy apologise."

"I wouldn't have apologised," I replied hotly. "He told me to speak the truth and I spoke the truth. I like Uncle Reuben, but I don't like his hands. They're cruel."

"It's sometimes better not to tell the whole truth, as you'll find out when you are a bit older," said my father. "Of course, you must never tell a lie."

"I wish you wouldn't put such ideas into the boy's head," said my mother.

This little thing it was which, I verily believe, inspired my uncle's lifelong enmity.

I remember the broken, bitten nails of my first school-master, the way my hands were bruised by the school bully—some very creditable torture can be accomplished by passing a lead-pencil over the middle finger and under the first and third and pressing hard—the marks my watch-chain made on the wrists of young Peters when I got big enough to bully in my turn, the grimy thumb of the tram-guard when he gave me my ticket on the way to school. I remember Monica's hot, grubby little paw, and clearest of all the stain of oil from the loom on the forefinger of little Amy Dewhurst, my first love.

§ iv

There are only two fêtes in the year for the right-thinking child, Christmas and the summer holiday. The first brings parents into touch with the mystical world which is the child's normal abiding-place. It is the elders who, when the time draws near the birth of Christ, are brought to a proper sense of the shadows that they are—pagan shadows too with their holly and mistletoe, their jewelled crackers and Christmas numbers, their thousands of slaughtered animals. And then the hoardings gay for mature consumption with their burning legends of Gorgeous Pantomimes, Dazzling Spectacles, Stupendous Successes. At one theatre you are to elect for Exquisite Scenery and Brilliant Costumes, at another for Fun Faster and Furiouser than Ever Before.

And if your father is awfully rich
He will take you to both, or else he will *not*,
I cannot be positive which,

as Mr Belloc might have said. For me as a child there was no torment so exquisite as the choice between two pantomimes, it being in those days an unheard-of thing for a properly brought-up child to be taken to more than one. What stabs of agony when you had made your choice and were finally there, and first a quarter of the wonderful night and then half began to slip all too relentlessly away. And the last hour of that earthly paradise when, like a wise man nearing his last days of spending, you threw away the minutes with both hands and lived only for the second! And the heartache when the curtain fell on the most spanking prince and most entrancing girl who ever danced

through tribulation in satin shoes! I forget what golden harridan it was who peopled my dreams between the ages of seven and twelve with her dashing presence, her rollicking spirits, her plumed three-cornered hats, her cockades and her diadems, her riding-whips and her jewelled garters. I forget what little lady in doublet of sage-green held my heart against all comers during the same period. I only know that when at my first Shakespearean play I beheld some actress of repute as the woodland Rosalind she seemed but the poorest patch upon my little green lady of the pantomime.

Summer holidays bring the bitter-sweet of the year, not the sea, which is a purely grown-up affair, but the seaside. I go once again through all the many stages that lead up to the delirious departure in the four-wheeled cab, the luggage gone before in a responsible, more slowly moving vehicle.

“Suppose, my dear,” my mother would say, “suppose we try somewhere else this year. Wales is getting so crowded.”

And my father would agree.

Then would follow the making out of lists of things to be taken, my father suggesting that it might be shorter to tabulate the things to be left behind; the cold fear that one might fall ill, or my father be called abroad, or Uncle Reuben tumble down in a fit. Then the last fever of packing, the farewells of old Margery left in charge of the summer cleaning, the terror that the luggage might be lost, that we should be late for the train, the crowd at the station, the frenzied hunt for the reserved compartment. All this would take place on the Saturday preceding August Bank Holiday. Then the choice of window-seats, the counting of

stations, the cold chicken and sip of claret in the train, the first glimpse of the sea at Mold, is it, or Prestatyn ? For of course we were bound for Wales after all. And now the getting out of the luggage, the welcoming station-master, the drive to the better-class lodgings in the village—the sea-front was thought by my mother to be “fast”—the familiar welcome by Mrs Griffiths, Hughes or Williams, the tea with real shrimps. Last, a Saturday evening, and then a Sunday of sheer anti-climax. My father tired, my mother busy unpacking and Sunday at the seaside the usual *dies non*, for thirty-six hours would I hang miserably about. What urgency of desire baulked, the most one could do being to eye possible playmates and wonder whether this year one would be considered old enough to join in the cricket matches on the sands ! A last place perhaps, Jaek and long-stop for both sides.

Oh, little, little town, I wonder whether you are changed to-day ? Does the road to the beach still go under the railway bridge, turn sharply to the right past the shop with the open door and magic litter of spades and buckets, pinnaces and sloops, cricket-bats and fishing-nets ? Does the treacherous little inshore stream still come in in advance of the tide and cut off all but old and experienced visitors ? I wonder whether it has become proper for little boys to take the quick cut to the beach—the hurry is tremendous—through the garden and down the entry, instead of the more formal road by the big hotel ; and whether a new generation of high-couraged, white-flannelled young men, sparks rather, has arisen to play lawn-tennis and walk with pretty ladies. Do little boys still confuse the glory of sea and sky with the taste of milk

and gingerbread ? Do they and their little girl cousins still look for star-fish together ? Does the lighthouse on the island still revolve, and by "revolve" I mean turn on a central axis, light, windows, masonry and all ; and can you count up to sixty waggons and more in the goods trains creeping along the embankment at night like gigantic caterpillars with eyes of fire ? Does the water still come over the falls and do they talk of Mr Gladstone at the cottage by the bridge ? Does the thatch on the little house where you turn off from the main road still grow flaming weeds ? Is the mysterious lake undiscoverable as ever in the bosom of the hills, and do adventurous souls still make the journey over the Carnedd's ? Do right-minded children call the hill behind the town by its proper name of Tiger Mountain, and do the stars come out as little tired boys begin to think of supper ?

I know that even now on summer nights a phantom singer will hoarsely bawl :

Come to me, sweet Marie,
Sweet Marie, come to me,
Not because your face is fair, love, to see,
But your soul, so pure and sweet,
Makes my happiness complete,
Makes me falter at your feet, sweet Marie.

A few brave chords on a ghostly harp, and then :

Oh; Tommy, Tommy Atkins,
You're a good 'un, heart and hand,
You're a credit to your country
And to all your native land.
May your luck be never failing,
May your love be ever true,
God bless you, Tommy Atkins,
Here's your country's health to you !

You may not hear the quavering voice and the uncertain plucking of the strings, but what is that to me? For me the years have not stilled them. For me the years have not dimmed the glory of the sunset gilding the Straits at the spot where you know the bridge must be, nor silenced the ripple of the waves, nor effaced the memory of the communion between the grave man of middle age and the boy trotting silently by his side. Oh little, little town, however soberly your heart beats in these sad, grown-up days, the heart of a boy beats to your time and measure now and for ever.

§ v

On the day after my ninth birthday I was sent to a boys' school known as "Mr Tindall's."

My first apprehension of the deceptiveness of earthly things dates from the recognition that Mr Tindall, surrounded by a class of small boys, was a very different person from the persuasive individual I had seen in my mother's drawing-room. On that occasion speech had been with the lady, and the schoolmaster did not find opportunity to say more than that he had never heard Mrs Hemans' *Oh, call my Brother back to me* recited with greater feeling. He then patted me on the head and said that I should not be lonely and was sure to make plenty of little friends. Now as I sate—I have always longed to make use of Dean Farrar's impressive version of that past tense—as I sate trembling on my lonely form I seemed to view Mr Tindall with different eyes. It was not given to me to know then as I know now that the school did not pay, that the schoolmaster's slender capital was shrinking fast, that he was

insufficiently fed, that his wife was a shade too pretty, and that on the very day of my arrival he had contracted an obligation to thrash before the whole school a hulking, overgrown youth towards whom he stood at a physical disadvantage.

In the matter of the little friends I can truthfully say that I made plenty of little enemies. I suppose I must have been a more detestable prig than is usually the case even with only sons. To begin with, I had been too well educated at home. I had as perfect a knowledge of the anecdotal side of English History as the compiler of *Little Arthur* herself. (In spite of proof to the contrary I should always insist on feminine responsibility for that delightful tale.) I am still convinced that the smear of red ink on the page which recounts the execution of Charles the First is a drop of the actual blood of that martyr. I knew my dates perfectly, and you could not have tripped me up by asking for the Edwards and the Henrys in their wrong order. I knew which monarchs had been "wise and good" and which "weak-minded and dissolute." I could describe the strategy which won us Creçy, and how the English fell into the trap at Bannockburn. I may not have been very clear about whom or what the Reformation was intended to reform, but I could reel off the candle-lighting epigrams of Messrs Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley. I knew what rivers take their rise "in the backbone of England," and how to tell a right bank from a left. I could enumerate the counties of Scotland and half those of Ireland, and was pat with the products of South America and Greece. I knew the multiplication table up to fourteen times and could write a tolerable essay in fair round hand. And so

before the first week was out it was conveyed to me that I was a beastly little "swat." I will not deny that I made some tactical mistakes such as cleverly answering a poser six places before my turn, crying out that Fish minor was "copying," and informing the mild gentleman who took us in French that the correct pronounciation of *pays* is *pay-ee* and not *pie*. On the eve of an important match I had thrown a stone across the playground and bruised the shin of the football captain. I had explained to a loutish youth that I did not want to understand the meaning of beastly words, which piece of self-righteousness resulted in a hiding and the glueing of my eye to a hole in the wall in the pretence of an interest in a neighbour's hen-run.

Other troubles I had, not of my own making. My first home-task consisted in learning by rote twenty lines of a poem beginning "The stag at eve had drunk his fill." Now I had learnt my Hemans and Laetitia Barbauld literally at my mother's knee, repeating the lines as she said them and mastering them after as many repetitions as were necessary. But twenty lines at a sitting! I got the first couplet perfect and then the second, but by the time I had mastered the third and fourth I had lost all knowledge of the first. I re-mastered these and could at last repeat eight lines without hesitation. But when I had arrived at the fourteenth I found I had forgotten all the preceding ones. I dug my fingers into my ears and started all over again. It was nearly nine o'clock and past bed-time. At half-past nine I was fretting badly, but my mother coming up to the schoolroom and hearing the words over calmly restored me. At ten o'clock my father demanded to know the meaning of all this

nonsense and packed me off to bed. I went to sleep with the tears still wet on my face. Remember that I was only nine. In the morning the miracle had happened ; I knew my lines perfectly and could recite them at top speed without the possibility of a mistake. I remembered them for ten years and then forgot them for ever.

I had the same experience with my first proposition in Euclid, which I learnt by heart without reference to the figure. My plight may be imagined when on the black-board X, Y and Z were most unfairly substituted for A, B and C. To prove that I had not entirely neglected my task, I offered to recite the whole proposition with the original letters, there and then shutting my eyes and reeling it off. The third master, who "took" us in "Maths.," at once set himself to explain that Euclid was "not poetry but sense." It was the second master who instructed us in English Literature, and there was no love lost between them.

It was a small school and the teaching, according to modern views, muddled and haphazard, but it was there that I received my only education. My general equipment qualified me for a place fairly high up in the school, but alas ! I had no Latin. Tindall was not to be denied, and took me privately in the mysterious ways of *amo*, *moneo* and *venio*. Behold me, then, after a fortnight's grounding, plunged, not into the middle of Gallic wars, but into the wanderings of Æneas.

And with what gusto did old Tindall translate his Virgil ! "Never mind the dictionary, boy ; put it in your own words. If anything extraordinary were to happen to you, *how would you tell them at home ?*" Before I was fourteen I had a very considerable know-

ledge of that sweet poet and had done, and done appreciatively, Voltaire's *Francis I.*, a good half of Molière and the whole of Schiller's *Der dreissigjährige Krieg*. These I had learnt to read as though they were written in my own tongue and by a writer of yesterday. In addition, I knew and revelled in *Coriolanus*, *Richard II.* and the two parts of *Henry IV.* I must confess that I could take no liking to *Henry V.*, of which the hero struck me as being the biggest prig in Shakespeare. On this eminence he remained until later years brought acquaintance with Isabella. The more grown-up tragedies we were not allowed to touch, the old boy holding that they should remain unspoiled for later life.

Often my father would help me with my home work, never failing to put his evening paper on one side when I was in real difficulties, but resolutely refusing to regard himself as a simple labour-saving device. Sometimes he would take down from the Keighley book-shelf a ponderous arithmetic of an out-of-dateness positively disconcerting, and a Walker's *Dictionary* which jibbed at nearly all the words in common use. I am not sure that at times I was not guilty of looking down upon his schooling. Fathers who fear to be scorned by your children, let me beg of you to realise that there is one thing even more important than keeping abreast of their slang, and that is to avoid taking down from your Keighley book-shelf some weighty tome by the help of which you will still be millions of decimal places out of modern reckoning! But perhaps you belong to the new, unsentimental order of parents, and do not know what a Keighley book-shelf is. Let me explain. My father and his

father before him were born at Keighley, and among the latter's boyish treasures were Miss Martineau's *The Crofton Boys*, and Miss Edgeworth's *Frank; Harry and Lucy, Sandford and Merton, Captain Cook's Voyages*, a few volumes of *Peter Parley* and an antiquated treatise on *Sun and Moon*. My mother kept these faded books on a shelf apart, gave them their collective name and bade me handle them tenderly. "They belonged to your father's father," she said, "and some day I hope they will belong to my son's son."

I soon realised that at school—and I have made the same discovery in later life—the essence of success is to supply not what people ought to want, but what they actually do want. Apart from his outlook on the poets, Tindall was like all other schoolmasters in this: that he demanded from his pupils not knowledge, but answers. A correct string of dynasties and battles earned from him more marks than the profoundest grasp of the trend of events. The tip for Magna Charta was that it was signed by a very evil-tempered king surrounded by a lot of angry barons on a damp island called Runnymede. I used to imagine the poor monarch, perpetually crowned and sceptred, chased all over his kingdom and finally cornered as in our game of blackthorn. Incidentally it was as well to remember that the object of the Charter was to free the barons from oppression by the king, and I used to wonder who or what it was that served to protect the people from the tyranny of the barons. As far as I am concerned sociological history is then silent for some three or four hundred years. Generations of warlike and spectacular monarchs seemed to spend their time tramping up and down France, all very heroically no doubt, and

in the ratio of one volunteer to fifteen "foreign mercenaries." Their success was unbroken, and I can never quite understand how we came to lose what we had so gloriously gained. On this point the history books were always silent. After the perfunctory termination to these the most Shakespearean of our wars the English kings appear to have had nothing better to do than to quarrel among themselves. My own view of the Houses of York and Lancaster is that they reigned simultaneously in different parts of England. Note that Tewkesbury is one good name for examination purposes and Pontefract (pronounced Pomfret) another. These civil wars concluded, prancing about upon cloths of gold and circumventing the marriage laws appear to have been the favourite occupations, giving place, in their turn, to the fright about the Armada, although like every self-respecting English boy I always felt that even if the Dons had landed they would have made little of our stubborn islanders and would sooner or later have been bundled into the sea. But of the sufferings and privations, of the belly needs and the spiritual wants of the people, not a word. Then suddenly John's barons come to life again in the persons of Pym and Hampden; only this time it is the Commons who are to be protected from the folly of a king claiming very beautifully and pathetically Divine Right and Prerogative. Nothing in my boyish perusal of history made stronger impression on me than the difference in class, as we should now say, between Charles's well-bred courtesy and the unadorned rudeness of his persecutors. The Roundhead had a cause to vote for; the Royalist died for his.

And this was about the extent of my historical

studies. The Restoration is not a popular period with schools, and I have never been in a class that has got beyond William and Mary. To sum up, all that I gathered of the great English past was one long series of highly-coloured lantern-slides portraying some accident to the individual. Monarchs stabbed while drinking, unhorsed by hot cinders and buried at Caen, slain by glancing arrows, crammed to distressful death with potted lampreys. Princes drowning in malmsey-butts. Bluff gormandisers. Pale ladies going limply to the block. In a word, a History of the English People without mention of the People.

What a jumble the foreign relationships of the past appear to have been ! I am still as ignorant as Little Peterkin as to what possible business Marlborough can have had at Blenheim, and why the Dutch should have wanted to come up our Medway. I do not believe that I should ever have heard of the discovery of America had it not been for the chance it has always given the historian of being amusing on the subject of eggs. Nor has it ever been explained to me what we are doing in India. Is it possible that trade and not altruism may have something to do with it ?

Hand-in-hand with this scrap-book notion of the march of English events went a complete ignorance of world history. One came across foreign monarchs only when it pleased our English sovereigns to go inimically or joustingly to meet them. I never heard of Charlemagne, Henri Quatre, Charles of Sweden, Peter the Great ; and only casually of the French Revolution. I was left completely in the dark as to all Roman history except that part of it which concerns 55 B.C. No, this is an injustice to my teachers and I

must correct myself. I *was* told of an Emperor, or he may have been a Pope, who thought Angles were Angels. But of Greek, Persian, Egyptian and Assyrian records, not a word. I learnt of the Trojan Wars from the pages of a child's paper called *Chatterbox*; of Scipio from an old copy of Plutarch's *Lives*. I had turned twenty before I had ever heard of the battle of Salamis, of the crossings of the Rubicon and the Alps, of the sack of Carthage. I am still entirely ignorant as to which of the Herods, if any, was contemporary with Cleopatra, and how the Pharaohs stand in relation to the Ptolemies, or Boadicea to Attila and Nebuchadnezzar. Surely it should be possible to synchronise history, to give the child a map of the world's events as of its mountains and its rivers. Surely there should be some way of suggesting to the next generation that the tomfoolery of the German William is only the bravery and swagger of our Edwards and Henrys half-a-dozen centuries out of date. History will have changed indeed if, a hundred years hence, she tells children something of the inner meaning of Bolshevism to the suppression of the exact number of troops engaged on the Vimy Ridge.

But I want history to do more than this. I want a drab declaration of the state of common existence side by side with the unfolding of the gorgeous pageant. I want every boy and girl to know who first imposed the Corn Laws and why, and who repealed them and for what reason. I want the historian and not the politician to tell our children of the true economic condition of the country—how much bread a child had to eat per day and on how many days a week it had meat—in the time of Bright and Cobden. I want the

historian and not the politician to make declaration of the comparative rate of wages, the cost *and scale* of living in Free Trade England and in Tariff-controlled—I won't say blessed or burdened—France or Germany. I don't want any waving of loaves, or rhetoric to the effect that The Foreigner Pays, A Tax on Leather means Cheaper Boots, Dearer Bread brings Higher Wages. I don't want war-cries and I hardly want deductions. I want facts as seen through the spectacles of unbiassed recorders. I would ask that history should be written by our judges, were not their long training in advocacy against them. I have no political views. Until I see Conservatives setting out the strong points of Free Trade and Liberals confessing to possible advantages in a system of Tariff Reform, I shall decline to believe that either side is trying to get at the root of the matter. I want history to explain the use we made of the passionate fire and zeal of Parnell, of the great abilities of Charles Dilke ; to enumerate exactly, item by item, the grievances of which the Irish Question was composed, and to explain how it came about that two great English parties, composed presumably of honest statesmen striving to help each other to find a cure for common ill, failed for three-quarters of a century to achieve anything beyond bitterness and hatred. And I shall want history to explain why the English nation, if it ever for a moment realised that its statesmen were mere carpet-bagging adventurers, did not rise up in its wrath and rid the country of these hindbersome pests. . . .

§ vi

I have refrained from giving any account of my father for the reason that a description of externals would tell the reader little, and then I am not sure that I ever quite understood him. He was a man of immense reserves and a quite abnormal shyness. As a characteristic detail let me record that, although he was curiously unable to whistle, yet when my mother was ill he would frame his lips to the ghost of a pipe until the arrival of the doctor put a term to his anxiety. He was a man of simple tastes. He never made any attempt to interfere with mine, or perhaps it would be better to say that I was unaware of any such attempt. He would leave books in my way, Marryat, Kingston and Fenimore Cooper when I was a small boy, Charles Reade and Dickens as soon as I began to go to school. At the week-end he would invite me to read aloud such of the political notes in *The Saturday Review* as seemed to me to be of interest, and the whole of the literary, musical and dramatic criticism of that journal. When old Tindall inflicted on us as a holiday task that tiresome masterpiece, *Old Mortality*, my father proposed that we should read aloud in turns, his idea of reading in turns being that I should wade through the Scott whilst he revelled, with certain unimportant deletions respectful to my mother's ears, in such stirring works as *Humphry Clinker* or *Tristram Shandy*. My mother always sat with her work at my father's elbow, and he would constantly interrupt the reading to adjust her shawl, pick up her wool, or any other of a hundred little offices. And my mother would smile and nod and wave to us to continue.

My father had broad sympathies and strong political views which he had the greatest difficulty in confining within the bounds of any particular party. It is true that he never made the attempt, that he voted as he liked, and was the despair of the canvasser and political agent. He had immense tolerance in the matter of religious opinion, and would attend indifferently at all places of worship. My mother and he were married at a Unitarian chapel by a Unitarian minister, and it was in this connection that I saw him indulge in one of his rare accessions of rage. It was brought about by the tactlessness of one Horatia Gadgett, widow of the Rev. Stephen Gadgett, late rector of St Euphorbius's. Insect-minded and intolerant, hung about with prejudices, it was this lady's habit to go shrouded in *crêpe*, smelling heavily of tuberoses, her bust a tinkling battery of woe. This walking catafalque, as my father would call her, had the unhappiness to say to my mother over our best tea-cups and with two streams of yellow butter trickling down her chin :

“ My dear, the least we can do in the way of grateful return for a marriage made in heaven is to take care that it is properly solemnised on earth. I need hardly say that I allude to our beautiful Church Service. I have never considered that you and your dear husband were properly married.”

Whereupon my father, each particular hair on end and the fervour of an interrupted page of Smollett strong upon him, rushed to the door, and in a voice half-way between roar and bellow, exclaimed :

“ My son, ma'am, is too old to be called a bastard. He is no fool and understands the implication. I give you good-day.”

And he flung the door open.

Then did the good Gadgett, assiduous pillar of an Established Church, but now quite, quite shaken, her kitchen battery jangled and out of tune, move to an exit, a quivering and inky jelly, an undertaker's venture in distress. At the door she broke down.

"I don't mean to say the boy's not born in wedlock;" she sobbed.

"How can you, James!" cried my mother, and fell to comforting the wretch. My father blew his nose, put on his hat, bade me fetch my cap, and walked me five miles within the hour without a word.

But it was to this narrow, limited soul that my father turned in the sad event which was to happen soon afterwards. I suppose I was as simple a lad as ever breathed, and there seemed to me to be nothing extraordinary in my father saying one evening shortly before Christmas :

"Your mother is a little run down and wants rest, so you are going to spend a few days at Mrs Gadgett's. I am sure you will be a good boy and give her no trouble."

There had been a prolonged frost and I spent most of the time skating with the Gadgett girls. Then one day my father called and remained for a long time in what seemed to be consultation with Horatia. I could hear them in the next room and I was conscious that he walked about a good deal. After a time they both came in, and my father looked very grave. He said little to me beyond bidding me continue to be a good boy, and promising that he would give my love to my mother. Soon afterwards he went away. Early next morning old Margery came to fetch me, saying that my mother was very ill and calling me "poor lamb" a great many

times. When we got home she was dead ; the child lived for a few hours.

In the time which followed I found my father entirely inconsolable and strangely lacking in any power to comfort me.

“ Your mother would not have liked us to make any difference in our daily round,” he said, and so we resumed all our old habits. But I noticed that he never settled himself to read without first placing my mother’s chair in its old position and resting his arm on the worn leather.

One night when we were half-way through *Don Quixote* he closed the book and said :

“ I shall have news for you, Edward, as soon as we’ve finished with the Don.”

The news was that I was to go to a boarding-school for three years. My father had taken it into his head that by keeping me at home he was sacrificing me to his need for companionship. He gave me a fortnight in which to prepare for the change, and putting thirty pounds into my hands and a printed list of the things which the school governors recommended as a proper outfit, told me to spend the money sensibly, and to buy only the best quality.

“ I don’t want to know how you lay out the money,” he said. “ You will have to make your own decisions some day and you may as well begin now.”

On the morning of my departure, a morning of wet fog, Dame Margery put round my shoulders an enormous muffler at which she had been knitting for weeks and of which I was secretly rather ashamed. She then pressed into my hand a half-sovereign, of which I was not ashamed at all. I kissed her, I hope

heartily. When we were nearly at our destination my father cleared his throat, looked out of the carriage window and said :

“ Edward, listen to me. I want you to promise to change your boots and socks whenever you get wet, and to write once a week.” He paused a moment and then went on : “ I want you to promise me never to do anything which you would be ashamed that your dear mother should see. I do not say that she is looking down upon you, but I do ask you to behave as though your conduct could give her joy or pain.”

I promised solemnly.

He then resumed : “ When you go to church you will take with you the Prayer Book which your mother used when she was a girl. You will not lose it, or mark it, or let any boy scribble in it.”

And he handed me a tiny packet. He then took out of his pocket a little cardboard box such as jewellers use. Removal of cotton wool and tissue paper revealed a gold watch and chain.

“ It ought to keep good time,” he said. Then, diving into his pocket and producing a couple of sovereigns : “ Your form-master will give you sixpence a week pocket-money, and you can have more whenever you need it by writing to me. But I would rather you managed on what I give you now and the Saturday sixpence.” Here he handed me the two sovereigns. “ I’ll send you a parcel of grub, or tuck, or whatever you fellows call it, once a month, or as often as may be allowed. In my time we called it ‘ jollyboy.’ I don’t suppose you will be allowed to brew. And don’t smoke. But if you do, go slow at first, or it will make you horribly sick. Or have you smoked already ? ”

“No,” I answered truthfully.

“And when you’re caught, don’t deny it. It’s never any use lying unless you are going to be believed. And above all, don’t say another fellow persuaded you to. We’re nearly there; I think the next station’s ours.”

Before the train stopped I had time to make a hurried examination of the watch. It bore that day’s date and the inscription: “From Father and Mother to their dear son.”

§ vii

Upthorne is one of the oldest of our Public Schools, its coat-of-arms a long-robed figure with a child which I always used to take for the Virgin Mary and Infant Jesus; its motto undecipherable, the aim of black letter being to baffle the diligent equally with the curious. At a distance of three miles you can see the school’s noble and imposing piles, white against grey scree, divided by the Flat, a level, asphalted area which seemed to me in my young days about ten times the size of a lawn-tennis court. Allowing for the shrinkage of years, suppose we say four times. The school dominates the town and is the town, it being inconceivable that there should be afoot energies other than scholastic. You can imagine Trollope writing in a window of the straggling High Street and Jane Austen looking about her from a pony-chaise. An old-time doctor with a faith in simples, a rustic parson and a weather-beaten vendor of honeydew and bull’s eyes, needles and string, were all our notabilities. The town is silent save for the babble of the beck—we are in Yorkshire—the calling of birds in the high wood and

the remote stir from the cricket field. The place has a fine incapacity for change. The original fifteenth-century building, so like the woodcuts in the history book, is still used for a carpenter's shop, and the churchyard's old graves, too old even to be cared for, are the only indication of the passing of time. Exquisites lorgnetting the devastating inscription were out of place here; this is the haunt of honest boyhood, let the jaded keep their distance.

My father with his usual tact refrained from showing himself too much with me. He deposited me at the porter's lodge, shook hands with the Headmaster as man to man, and vanished. It was not until later that I discovered that he must have kicked his heels about the sleepy village for five or six hours.

"New boys will assemble in the Headmaster's study at half-past five," announced the porter.

The hour was well turned and I was still in the cricket field watching a swarthy youth, Westrom, the fast bowler, sending down corkers to a modest young giant who was none other than Eastwood, the captain of the first eleven. There were not many boys "up," the presence of the two cracks determined by the absolute necessity of practice before the match with Sedleigh. I was ordered to fag out, to keep my eyes skinned, and to send 'em up sharp. Another youngster similarly occupied was Eastwood's fag, who had been ordered by his master to present himself a day before his time, and who had cheerfully obeyed. At eleven years of age it is indeed better to be fag to the captain of the first eleven than to be ruler over many kingdoms. Presently Eastwood gave the pads to Westrom, who proceeded to smite the captain's innocent slows all over

the ground. Once he sent me a tremendous skier. I had to run a good way, but I judged it perfectly, waited without fluster, and having held the catch chucked the ball up with studied calm.

“Not bad for a young ’un,” said Eastwood condescendingly. “Let’s see if you can bowl. Mind you don’t send any to leg, or you’ll have to fetch ’em,” he added, motioning his fag to long-off and going behind the stumps to talk to his friend.

As I took my jacket off to bowl six o’clock boomed out on the schoolhouse clock, and I remembered the call to the Headmaster’s study. My heart gave a great thump, and I begged leave to be allowed to go. Westrom heard me out and said coolly: “It’s too late, kid, anyhow. So trundle ’em up and look slippy.”

There was nothing for it but to obey. I didn’t bowl badly and Westrom declared I had him out twice, once in the slips and once at cover.

“I want a left-hand bowler for the second eleven,” said Eastwood, “and if you can liek this kid into shape I’ll give him a trial.” This as though I had no free-will in the matter.

At Big School next morning, immediately after prayers—at which we were arranged in order of juniority, new boys in front, then the little boys, and so on according to forms to the seniors at the back—I heard the Head call out my name in thunderous accents.

“Stand up!” the awful voice continued, “and tell me why you did not come to my study yesterday evening.”

Before I had time to collect my senses I heard Westrom’s deep bass: “I am responsible, sir. Marston was bowling to me”—bowling, not fagging, and this

before the whole school—"and I overlooked the time. It was entirely my fault, sir."

The matter was apologetic, the manner uncompromising.

To which the Head: "Very good, Westrom. I accept the explanation. Let us hope that we shall manage to work as diligently as we play. Marston, you may sit down."

I had entered the room a new boy, and I came out a personality. I had bowled to Westrom. Next day I found I was to be his fag.

But I am not writing a school story, still less a scenario for the romantic stage. Nothing could have been less like the sentimentalising of a Raffles and his Bunny than my relations with Westrom. The fellow hated the idea of fagging, and his principal use for me was to swathe me in pads and gloves, batter out of recognition my remainder body, and send my stumps flying. Every time I kept them intact for half-a-dozen overs he gave me sixpence, with the result that after a time I became a tolerable bat. At the end of term he left without telling me where his home was or exhibiting the faintest desire to continue the acquaintance. I thought him a moody, violent fellow. He had no knick-knaeks in his study, where he lived with monkish simplicity. At school I learned nothing of him, and when I met him again it was as though I had never known him. He certainly gave no promise of the gentle, affectionate creature he was to become.

The change of school put me back a full two years. They could not understand at Upton that I had a considerable amount of Virgil and no Cæsar, nor that I could be fairly advanced in French and German and

possess not a ha'porth of Greek. So back I had to go to the Lower Third, and I had the sense to say nothing about having decorated an Upper Fifth. Learning, it seems, is of variable quality, and that which is gold at one school is not necessarily currency at another. What were the things the old poet confesses to having learned during his three years at Rome—to avoid extravagance and gormandising, to humour a creditor and to keep a still tongue? Such, slightly modernised, were the limits of my attainment at Upthorne. I learned to please junior masters and to go in no fear of the Head, to work desperately at games and with studied moderation at lessons, to smoke a pipe with an air of liking it, to swear as becomes a young gentleman of parts, to steer clear of sentiment.

I have never been able to decide how far our school-masters are honest with themselves. Do they more urgently desire to beat their sister-foundations at cricket and football or to fit their charges for the battle of existence? I have never met a Public School boy who knew his commercial right hand from his left, or the different sides of an account-book. I learned nothing at Upthorne which would have enabled me to keep a grocery store. What I did learn was the charm of evening service in a crowded chapel, the lights lowered and the Headmaster talking quietly. I came to realise that the Public School boy turned master may not be half so good a teacher as the bright Board School youth commencing usher, but that if he be the right sort he will have something to say worth listening to when he asks you to cocoa after prayers. More cynical things I learned too. I learned to acquiesce in the giving of the good conduct prize to an anæmic, consumptive-

looking youth without energy for vice, who looked as though he could never survive the term but always did, and is now a highly successful manipulator of rubber shares. I learned the meaning of irony when Illingworth ma., the head of the school, commonly known as "Pi," a fellow of stupendous intellect and microscopic appetite, asked for a second helping of pudding. With ironic gusto the Headmaster gave the school a half holiday in honour of the event, and proposing a match Masters *versus* Boys, went in first himself and absent-mindedly stayed at the wicket the whole afternoon. They put Illingworth ma. at extra-slip, where he never handled a ball, and the boys did not bat. I knew astonishment when, after the accident to Tuffnel ma., Tuffnel mi. came into prayers with a Bible; and the meaning of loss when Caulfield, the butt of the school, died during an epidemic of fever.

§ viii

For three years I stayed at Upthorne, and then my father died. In the sad time which followed my main support was my cousin, Monica. Have I described her? If I were indifferent to the reader's good opinion I had long ago attempted a portrait. But I want you to take to her, oh, to take to her immensely, and I cannot afford a failure. Monica possessed a passion for sturdy loyalty; she could question, doubt, condemn, but she understood the meaning of friendship in the schoolboy, thick-and-thin interpretation of the term. Most of us are incapable of anything finer than that poor passion which will go back on the man who reveals himself to be other than his friend had thought

him. Of such speciousness Monica was supremely incapable; she was your friend to the prison gate if need be.

It was Monica who first gave me news of the serious state of my father's health. Her letter was not in the croaking vein, though the warning was undeniable.

"I thought Uncle James looked a little better yesterday, but he is very thin. He pinched my cheek and called me his mouse, his brown velvet mouse. I was wearing the frock you like so much. Then he looked out of the window for quite a long time. 'Mind you tell Ned how much stronger I am getting,' he said. It really tires him to walk at all, but he pretends to be active. Dad says that no man can count on living for ever, and that the Almighty can't be expected to make exceptions. I can't always understand Dad. . . ."

One morning I was sent for to the Headmaster's study, where I found the old man standing by the window with an open letter in his hand. He looked at me kindly and spoke gravely.

"I have to tell you that your father is ill," he said. "Very ill. In fact I judge from your uncle's letter that it may be necessary for you to return home at any moment. You had better get your box packed in readiness. You can have the rest of the day to yourself. I will send the school porter to Mr Williams to say that you will be absent for the remainder of the lesson."

I do not remember that I said a word.

I left the room, a little dazed if you will, but entirely without the sense of apprehension. It all seemed unreal, and besides any event which breaks the monotony

of school is an adventure. Is this ghastly, inhuman? I hope it is a trick of the brain. I have no doubt that at prayers that night I looked self-conscious enough. With the following morning came my uncle, and I was at once sent for. Reuben gave me a glance of civil commiseration, and tendered a fish-like projection of black glove. As he was always a little formal and prone to ceremony at any launching of himself into speech, I had time to choose my ground. I said, and the words sounded stilted even in my own ears :

“ I am glad to see you, Uncle Reuben, though I must suppose you bring bad news.”

I had found myself debating the alternative values of “ must suppose ” and “ cannot but suppose.” The reader will probably put me down as an unconscionable prig. Maybe. To be bereft of speech is one thing, to talk like a sloven is another. Even the wretch turned off the gallows may be forgiven for using English until speech is choked out of him.

I added almost immediately : “ If my father is dead, please say so.”

With a good deal of well-simulated emotion and some lengthy circumlocution my uncle brought himself to the simple admission. Reuben was at all times a rich spectacle, but he excelled himself that morning. I do not think that alone with me he would have been at more than perfunctory pains ; at lunch in the additional presence of the Headmaster's wife and daughters his windy suspirations were those of the mummer on grand occasion. I suppose the meal may be said to have passed off well. We were driven to the station in the doctor's pony-carriage, my uncle bestowing a handsome five shillings on the boy who drove us.

Comfortably settled in a corner seat with his back to the engine, the window adjusted to his liking and a cigar well alight, Reuben proceeded to open the little black bag from which he was never separated. It is here to be remarked that if the old fox was never to be seen without the bag he was never to be seen with an umbrella. He was clever enough and sufficiently well read in his Dickens to know an umbrella to be the classical property of the humbug, and he fought deliberately shy of the treacherous indication. I insist on this as evidence that my uncle was worth crossing swords with ; he was no puny whipster in deceit.

Reuben then drew out of the bag a heterogeneous assortment of papers. First a number of reports of directors' meetings which he had not attended but for which he had drawn the fees. Then a cheerful document setting forth the advantages of cremation and ornamented with tasteful compartmental drawings on the lines of safe-deposits. The compiler of the *brochure*, a genius if ever there was one, had contrived to bring together the phrase "God's Acre" and a design in admirable perspective of something that looked like a factory chimney in marble. Then a crowd of other papers, among which I detected the annual reports of half-a-dozen industrial schools and penitentiary establishments, the rota of the County Police Court with my uncle's turn of service marked in red ink, subscription lists of the Society for the Dissemination of the Natural Virtues of which he was chairman, and the British and Foreign Parable Elucidation Society of which he was president. A lecture on banking, a memorandum appertaining to the Tolerated Houses of Calcutta with some notes on the Overcrowding of

Bazaars (India) by the Bishop of St Eurasia's, Stepney. I am not going to pretend that my uncle ever read any of this nonsense; he liked to frame himself in it, to litter railway carriages with it. He *travelled* it as salesmen travel their samples.

"I think, my boy," he began, "that it would take your mind off the sad event if we were to have a little Serious Talk. Yesterday you were a boy in years; to-day you are a man in responsibility. I have here an Agreement which your father and I drew up some months ago. I think that even then he must have been conscious that Death's fell hand——"

Here he brought himself to a sudden stop. I suppose he saw that he was wasting a good phrase. He coughed and went on:

"The arrangement is more or less informal. No one had greater confidence in me than your father; no one has ever known me better than your father. He knew that my Word was better than my Bond. But we had several long and rather involved talks together, which I suggested might be conveniently reduced to writing. Your father concurred. Not that a Written Agreement is more binding than a Verbal. On the Contrary."

I must apologise for the use of capital letters, but I can find no other means of expressing the shade of unction my uncle threw into his voice. When he talked so you felt that he preached at you, that his arms emerged from lawn sleeves, that he was in the pulpit.

"This Agreement," he went on, tapping the document with a gold pencil and the loving pride of an artist considering his handicraft, "is an agreement for partnership. It provides for the entry into partnership

with your father and me, or the survivor of us, of his son and mine, so soon as you shall both have attained the age of twenty-five years."

I do not propose to give a verbatim account of the Deed. It was conceived in Reuben's best vein, and to it he had devoted the most flowing of his copper-plate. I believe that if he had not been afraid of my father's mockery he would have fastened little red seals all over it. The provisions were made *mutatis mutandis*, it being one of Reuben's foibles to garnish his speech with technical tags of uncertain application. In other words the agreement was to hold good whichever of the brothers-in-law died first. Can't you see him expatiating to the dying man on the obvious fairness of such an arrangement? In case of my father dying my uncle was to act as my guardian until such time as I should attain the age of twenty-five. Until this date my father's capital was to remain in the firm for the firm's use and advantage, my uncle to be paid for my keep two hundred pounds a year out of the interest, which was to be at the rate of five per cent., the balance to accrue for my benefit. As soon as I left school I was to work for the firm at a salary of one hundred pounds a year with yearly increases of fifty pounds. At the age of twenty-five, my capital, which now stood at some twelve thousand pounds, was to be paid out to me, and I was then to have the option of entering the firm in partnership with my uncle and cousin at a fourth share.

I suppose the agreement was as fair as most legal agreements, although I hold that partnerships between honest men need be verbal only. Not so any partnership of Uncle Reuben's. His to safeguard and forestall,

to make provision against the possibility of latter-day floods and the eventuality of second comings. The present document was verbose, in abominable English, tiresome and meandering, but it never wandered far from the main point, which was the ease and security of the Surviving Partner. And Reuben intended to be that Surviving Partner. One of the clauses provided that whichever should survive should have the right, as soon as both young men had got properly into harness, to squat him down on his hams in idleness, and for the rest of his life draw half the profits of the concern.

“Of course,” said my uncle lightly and without stress, “it is understood that these presents may be rendered null and void”—how lovingly did he liek his villainous old chops over the legal-sounding phrase—“by misconduct, moral lapse and so forth, on the part of the younger parties, which might in the opinion of the surviving partner be detrimental to the best interests of the concern.”

“Of course,” I answered vaguely.

“A copy of the agreement will be supplied to you in due course.”

I learnt that I was to go to my uncle's until after the funeral. On the way home we called at the office that Reuben might accomplish the solemn function known as signing the letters.

I followed him through the crowd of clerks, salesmen, porters and errand-boys, all shabbily dressed and with that unmistakable expression which comes from too much striving to make ends meet. To fail may lead to a fine despair; barely to succeed and to keep on barely succeeding is a dull business. The old cashier,

too typical of old cashiers to need describing, took my hand in both of his and, again in character, said :

“Man and boy I’ve served your father for forty years. I’m terribly grieved and upset, Mr Edward ; so are we all. The staff and self feel deeply for you, sir, deeply. We hear you are to be in Mr Reuben’s care.”

I turned away and it seemed to me that he was crying.

The outward show of grief is the affair of the nervous organism and has nothing to do with grief itself. How many tears have I shed over Margery’s nursery tales, how easily do I weep now over some sentimental page ! And yet it needed this old retainer’s emotion to give the cue to mine. I had not till that moment shed a tear.

§ ix

After the reading of the will I returned to the old home which I had not seen since the previous holidays. I found the house swept and garnished, a cheerful fire burning in the study, and old Margery waiting to receive me in sober black though with an air of being steeled to a reasonable mournfulness.

“It’s good to see you, Mr Edward,” she said with calm, and refraining from lamentation. Yes, she had been admirably drilled, I doubted not by whom.

“Your father told me to give you this,” holding out a bulky envelope. “There’s a good fire in the study and I’ll send tea in shortly.”

She lingered a minute, and then with some hesitation :

“I’m glad you take it so quietly, Master Ned. You’re very like your father.”

“Why don’t you say ‘your poor father’ like every-

body else?" I couldn't help asking. I felt I must know why she abandoned the traditional formula.

"I was left particular instructions," she replied. "'You are to speak of me to Master Edward as I have taught you to speak of your mistress. As little black as possible and no fuss.'" And with that she retired into her pantry.

I went into the study, sat down at my father's desk and examined the packet which was addressed "To my son, Edward Marston. To be opened after my death." Taking up the big ivory paper-knife, I slit the envelope open and found inside a lengthy document of which the remarkableness were lost unless my father's simplicity and incapacity for pose be given full value. It was dated some four months earlier.

MY DEAR EDWARD,—When you read this

Je seray sous la terre, et, fantosme sans os,
Par les ombres myrteux je prendray mon repos.

I use the French to arouse your literary instinct and so counterbalance any excess of emotion you may have in opening my letter. By the way "myrtled shades" would not be a really good translation of *ombres myrteux*. It is too literal and perhaps too poetic. It is a sound rule in poetry to avoid the poetic. Ronsard is the author; it is not a rare quotation.

But my object in writing is not to give you a lecture on French poetry, but a hint or two about life, and what is even more important, about your uncle. Life, my dear boy, has only two aspects worth considering. One is the life you lead to yourself, the other is the part played by money. Remember always to keep yourself

to yourself, as the servants say. Or if you cannot lock up your heart entirely, choose a friend—it had better be a man—and give it into his keeping. But don't at your peril wear it on your sleeve. Remember that your intimate joys and sorrows are necessarily a bore to the rest of the world. You lose your dog and a hundred amateurs will condole with you, your loss affording them occasion to show off their dog-lore. Do not confound. The world is honest enough to refrain from selling dogs; it is too vain not to talk dog. You suffer bereavement in a graver sense and you become a nuisance. The men at your club hesitate to crack jokes in your presence; they wonder whether they have accomplished the rigmarole proper to the occasion. Did I ever tell you of the old German Jew's recipe for condolence? You put on a hang-dog air and recite the letters of the alphabet under your breath as fast as you can. It is very impressive, it seems. You will nearly always find a Jew to be more amusing than a Christian. For one thing he is generally so very much more intelligent. Note, by the way, that the only tolerable Germans are Hamburg Jews. If only they could forget Bismarck what a delightful race they would be!

In all that you really live for, then, you live alone. We are a shamefaced people and our deepest interests are matter for silence. To discuss religion is to behave as a boor. To talk music or literature is unprofitableness. Politics, by which we mean party politics . . . Faugh! I advise you to learn some conversational tags, shooting, horses, women. Remember that "trade follows the flag," on condition that it doesn't precede it. You will be dining principally in Manchester.

Apart from your inner life the only other thing that matters is money. This is not cynicism, but intellectual honesty. Your uncle, despite his rapacity, has always had enough money to keep him out of gaol. To a poor man genius such as his would have been an immense danger. He has never forgiven me for not consenting to invest Aunt Windsor's money in the business, thereby liberating enough capital to secure us a controlling interest in old Buckley's Mill. You know they paid forty per cent. for over ten years and are still doing well. We should have made a fortune, and in view of your uncle's wonderful *flair* for a good thing there was little or no risk. In this matter of money I shall leave you moderately well off, and ultimately rather more than a quarter share in a good business. I trust I have done wisely in tying up your money and binding you to your uncle till you are twenty-five. If ever you want to marry, what I shall leave you will be enough. If you don't, you will find the amount handsomely inadequate! The world is a big place to have the bachelor run of. As an honest man you will always have plenty; as a ne'er-do-weel you will always be in difficulties. Remember that whatever the men you meet may be talking, they are always thinking money. It is their lodestar, their mainspring, what you will. My advice to you is to stick to honesty; it is the only way by which you can circumvent your uncle. His whole life is devoted to setting snares for others and in countering the cunning schemes which he imagines the whole world to have on foot against him. Some years ago, an Assyrian customer of ours called at the office saying that he was about to take a trip to his native land and begging to

introduce the fellow who was to represent him during his absence. After I had bowed them out the old Crusader came back alone, half opened the door, insinuated his head and putting one finger to his nose whispered confidentially: "He is my partner. *Do not trust him!*" Some day your Uncle Reuben will be your partner.

And now, my dear boy, I have to talk to you of another matter, not in a more serious strain, perhaps, but in a different one. I will not agree that the end of my life is a more serious matter than the beginning of yours. It is a different one, that is all.

Not to beat about the bush, the doctors do not give me long. I am grieved for your sake; I am more annoyed than frightened for my own. I have found the world an intensely interesting place and I cannot say that I possess anything that can be technically termed faith. . . . It would be the normal and proper thing for me to tell you that I am going to join your mother; I do not know; I feel no certainty. Suppose I had been married twice? I can say in complete honesty that she is my bulwark against fear. What she has suffered I can suffer. I hope I am not afraid. . . . I am conscious that this is nonsense. Of course I am afraid. I have the most preposterous fears, fear of an infinity of lonely wakefulness in the dark of our smallest prison. The *idea* of oppression frightens me, the tight lid and the vile, sinister shape. I fight for air. And then with an effort I force myself to remember that whatever terrors may be in store they cannot be the terrors of the earth. I am not afraid of viewless winds or thick-ribbed ice. I am afraid of negation, of not being. "What most I prize, it ne'er was mine,"

runs the hymn. I cannot bring myself to Christian resignation. What father would endow his child with all that delicate machinery of appreciation only to take it away when delight was at its fullest? But I forget that philosophy has decided that the First Cause may very well be ignorant of the humaner feelings, that the whole may be less charitable than its part.

I think perhaps the Shakespearean "inevitable" view is the best. I will copy the passage for you :

"By my troth, I care not ; a man can die but once ; we owe God a death. I'll ne'er bear a base mind ; an't be my destiny, so ; an't be not, so. No man's too good to serve's prince ; and let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next."

Note that Shakespeare was so rich that he could afford to squander this jewel on a woman's tailor. Like Feeble I'll ne'er bear a base mind. And then there is the other view ; the view that I might have lived too long ; lived to see you unhappy. You will realise that I have made provision of all the comfortable tags.

I am convinced that if anybody is in the right about heaven, since it cannot be the parsons it must be the poets. I would allow no parson to preach unless he could first scrape through a simple examination in Darwin, Huxley and Herbert Spencer. A loose-living clergyman is unfrocked ; why not a loose-thinking one? I remember many years ago being in a crowded street when a thunderstorm of great fury broke over us. A brewer's dray went past on which was sitting an old, old man, who fell off into the road. I remember that the whirling of the

storm was such that it *obliterated* the human bundle. I have often thought that the whole of our world may be some such unconsidered bundle hurrying to obliteration. The Church does not seem to be aware that we are moving through space at some considerable speed. Nor has it ever proved that the Supreme Force which is responsible for human compunction has consciousness of that quality.

There is a kindly belief that as the body wears out the spirit wears out also. Do not believe this. I shall die with my spirit awake and my eyes open.

My great hope, my boy, is in you. I trust you will not hear in these simple words that cant which is to me of all sounds the most distressful. I cannot understand the dissenting chapel. I realise that there may be good in the habit of Sunday debate with a chairman to keep order, but do not let us confuse that with worship. You cannot worship a being and argue about his existence and conditioning at the same time. I have, as you know, attended churches of all denominations and found the proper atmosphere of worship—pagan in the sense of adulation without understanding—in the Roman Church alone. I have overcome my dislike to the flummery of untidy priests, obviously thinking of anything except their devotions. I have forced myself to see a symbol of the sublime in the tinsel and putty of an image. There I have been able to worship, although it has meant relinquishing the faculty of reasoning. I sometimes fear that prayer is not more than a cowardly desire to be on the right side, *Primus in orbe Deos fecit timor*, you know.

In my reasoning mood, when my nerves are steadier, I repeat that my great hope is in you. You are my

immortality. There is much in the universe that is arguable, but there is, fortunately, much also which is undeniable. And the least deniable of all things is the great thrust of Nature towards life, towards ever more and more life. This may not be more than compensation for the death and decay going on around us, but whatever the reason, the desire and thrust are there. Now I am a man of business and have never believed in the possibility of getting something for nothing. The price of life is the obligation to confer life in our turn. Remember that I am part of you for ever, and that when you too are a father, you will be part of your son for ever. The obligation to live decently is obvious.

[There was a slight break in the letter and then, in firmer writing :]

I am in altogether better spirits to-day and ready to stare the old bogey out of countenance. What I chiefly feel is the regret that so fine and complex a piece of machinery as the human body should be capable of wearing out. I have felt the same about old looms.

But I will not have Portwood. Anybody else, but not that unctuous ruffian. I detest Portwood. I detest his walk, his Stygian cheerfulness, his mourning rings, his double chins. He is Micawber *pris au sérieux*.

He too has a roll in his voice and it makes me shudder. He would weep black tears an he could. I have seen too much of Portwood. In my capacity of executor I have had acquaintance of him in his sanctum. We have turned over catalogues together, compared headstones, appraised *caskets*. I have heard him hold

forth on the superior advantages of four horses. "Not that a pair of our blacks is not up to the job. *Quite* the reverse. But there are families in which four horses have always run, and four horses are four horses after all. They give the ceremony an air." Had I the knack I would put him into a comedy; I have no objection to comic undertakers. There's a precedent, and it isn't as though we hadn't the actors. There's Kemble, who would be rich and loam-y, and Neville, who would give him the grand air of one of his own cavalcades. Portwood's an exquisite, you know. But then I've seen him off duty, one with his kind. It was at a railway station. Incredibly he proposed a "nip," and I accepted out of sheer nervousness. No, I will not have Portwood.

A father who cracks jokes from the other side! "*En voilà du comique! Allons, il faut savoir se tenir tranquille dans sa tombe.*"

A very gentle essayist whom I have heard you disparage—but you will live to repent—asks whether *irony itself* can be one of the things that go out with life. "Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides, when you are pleasant with him?" I like to think that you, my boy, and I may still laugh together.

I have little to say to you of last things. I prefer to think that all that matters has been implied while we were together.

It is finished. *Barka!* as the Arabs say.

Your affectionate father,

JAMES MARSTON.

By his will my father left my mother's watch and a thousand pounds to Monica, a hundred a year to old

Margery, and all his other personal effects, which were few, to me, with a recommendation to sell the house and furniture and so avoid sentimental embarrassments. I carried out his wishes strictly, keeping nothing except the Keighley books.

“I suppose I shall not go back to school till after the holidays?” I said to my uncle a day or two later.

“You are not going back to school at all,” he replied gravely. “The age comes to all of us when we must put away Childish Things. You are no longer a child and there is work awaiting you. We must all of us Work, Work while it is yet Day.”

CHAPTER II

§ i

MUCH has been written about the difficulty of the dramatic form, not enough of its convenience. The dramatist is free to bring the curtain down on the most desperate of plights from which no issue is humanly conceivable, to raise it again upon the most careless of triumphs. He is not to concern himself with ways and means, with that trifling matter of ocean fares. The bankrupt sets sail, the millionaire returns. *Et voilà! C'est simple comme bon jour!* I would not begrudge the playwright his arbitrary slashings were he to confine them to knots strictly Gordian; it is the frivolous, unnecessary curtains I am jealous of, bringing to violent ends scenes unticable by a simple stroke of common-sense.

I am going to take a leaf out of the dramatist's book.

I am going to pass over the few weeks of grace which preceded my plunge into the whirlpool of business. They were weeks in which nothing happened except that I acquired a wider experience of the characters of my newly adopted family. One of the most disconcerting of discoveries is that the more you know of people the less easy it is to go on disliking them. My cousin Geoffrey always excepted.

Geoffrey Torkington Ackroyd—my aunt was a Miss Torkington—was short-sighted and red-haired to the extent in which these physical defects encroach upon the moral. He was boorish in manner and hesitant of speech, combining a singular dullness of apprehen-

sion with an extreme degree of contempt for the intelligence of others. He bit his nails. His allowance of dress money being less than mine and the two of us about the same size, he would make offers to me for my part-worn suits of clothes. Or he would haggle for tailors' misfits, with a preference for trousers several inches too long, preaching that when the bottoms were frayed the extra length enabled you to cut off an inch and neatly cobble. He wore reversible cuffs and dickies, and low collars of which the smallness of the area of visibility decreased the need for washing. He was addicted to fretwork and did a profitable trade among his intimates in watch-stands, bookcases, knife-and-fork rests; and I seldom knew him to cut into a fresh piece of wood without a definite commission. He stuffed birds. He attended lads' clubs and was anxious in a dull, unimaginative way that the world around him should improve its mind. When I was deep in *Manon Lescaut* he would recommend Miss Yonge's *A Dove in the Eagle's Nest*. One vice I have never forgiven him: that of whistling on all possible and impossible occasions; an aggravating, insistent, hour-long improvisation without sequence, rhythm, or tune.

"Bird seed!" I overheard a half-starved clerk mutter. "Give 'im bird seed, and 'e'll sing for hours like a blarsted canary!" The fellow had a consumptive wife and two unhealthy children, and I had not until then suspected him of being a wit. My cousin was in great demand at dances, and indeed such intelligence as he had was in his legs. At home my uncle cherished his son as the apple of his eye; in business he knew him for a fool.

Two incidents come into my mind. The first at a

Christmas party when a handsome piece of jewellery stolen from a cracker was found in a pocket of my overcoat. Geoffrey, taxed with the theft, had thought to halve his guilt by implicating me as instigator and receiver.

“Ned said that if I could get it he would take care of it.”

When some years later we were both caught smoking it is to be noted that he had in no way modified his defence.

“It was Edward who wanted to smoke,” he said, “and he asked me to as well. So that we should both smell alike.”

I had not lived many weeks at Oakwood before I began to conceive an immense esteem for my Aunt Sarah. She was a large woman of great force of character and in no way given to idolatry in the matter of her husband. She had the Yorkshire woman's uncompromising directness, and stands out in my recollection as a model of manner. She abhorred all affectation and could have received a queen. She used to say laughingly that if ever the Queen came to see her “when Reuben is a knighted mayor and a cubit or so taller,” she hoped she should not forget in her confusion as subject her dignity as hostess. It was from my aunt that I learned all those insignificant courtesies which are now so hopelessly out of date: not to open the newspaper until my uncle had seen it, not to talk across tram-cars, to give the wall to old ladies, to be polite to beggars, to take off my hat to the maids when I met them in the street. It was she who taught me the respect due to music and to books. Music was to be bound and sewn and taped and kept together;

books were to be covered in brown paper with the titles neatly written on the back. My cousins and I were obliged to make inventories of our small libraries and account for every book at a half-yearly stocktaking. On these occasions our clothes and boots were also subjected to a review of dragonsome severity, a kit inspection, if you like. Aunt Sarah would have jibbed at the word, but she insisted upon the thing.

I shall never forget going to call with her on a retired dancer who had married a rich tallow-chandler. This lady had graciously let it be known that she might not be disinclined, at a strictly moderate subscription, to open a bazaar at the chapel where we worshipped. After the negotiations with which my aunt was entrusted had been simperingly settled, tea was brought in, and with tea the thinnest possible slices of bread and butter. Whereupon the ex-charmer of multitudes, whose newly gilt manners had provoked my aunt to a state bordering on exasperation, began to exhibit signs of acute distress.

"Never, never," she deplored from the tip of her tongue, "can one get adequate service from female domestics. The sluts!" she added, with full-throated vigour and a nearer approach to sincerity than we had yet seen.

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired my aunt soothingly.

"Where are the bread-and-butter tongs?" said the ex-tight-rope-dancer.

"Bread-and-butter fiddlesticks!" exclaimed my aunt, her sense of sanity and proportion up in arms. "The Queen herself doesn't use 'em, and you, my girl, will never learn how!"

To my immense surprise the ex-dancer burst into tears ; whereupon my aunt, genuinely softened, went over to her and patted her hand.

“ I am a plain old woman,” she said, “ and you are a very pretty young one, and I am afraid I have exceeded even a plain old woman’s privilege. Forgive me, my dear.”

The tongs being then brought in, my aunt said they were a very handsome set and quite a capital idea for a wedding present, there being small risk of duplication ; which little tactfulness led to a happy reconciliation, the ex-dancer becoming less mannered and almost natural. She told us about her Tobias and how he had worshipped her at a respectful distance—the first row of stalls, to be exact—for many anxious weeks before he had asked to be allowed to pay his addresses.

“ My legs just danced their way into his heart,” she sighed, dabbing gingerly at her cheeks with the tiniest of handkerchiefs. “ And there they’ve remained ever since.”

My aunt was certain that they had.

Other callers arriving, she plunged for the tongs and made a bold and creditable show with them.

“ That woman is a fool,” my aunt said when we were safely outside, “ but a good-hearted fool.”

She had sympathy with every creature that breathes, with the exception of trained nurses.

“ I don’t believe in ’em,” she urged vigorously on the occasion of one of Geoffrey’s illnesses. “ How can the woman turn the boy in bed with those stiff cuffs on, or give him his medicine with that new-fangled bow of hers tickling her chin. It’s not decent.”

I remember that once she found a nurse—an in-

efficient ninny, as it happened—letting a poultice get cold while she prinked and scalloped it with a fork to make it look pretty ; which led to my aunt boxing her ears soundly and never so much as answering the ensuing protests and lawyers' threats.

In his own home my uncle had altogether *bon caractère*. Sunday was guest-day at Oakwood and there was generally a large party for midday dinner, at which we youngsters were not allowed to speak until my aunt had given the signal upon a little silver bell. The ringing of the bell was also the sign for my uncle to play the fool, which he did most agreeably, cracking jokes and constructing towers of Babel with the decanters and fruit dishes. He had a nice architectural sense and catastrophes were rare. But his principal feat consisted in balancing a cup of custard on his forehead and juggling simultaneously with two Jaffa oranges and a tangerine. Finally he would propound some ancient, infantile riddle of which it was traditional that Monica should supply the answer.

As for that little person, she has always been perfect in my eyes.

§ ii

Late in the evening of my seventeenth birthday my uncle called me into his study.

“ You are going to start business to-morrow, Edward,” he said.

“ Does that mean sweeping out the office ? ” I answered, cheekily enough, my head full of inculcatory nonsense of the *Log Cabin to White House* order.

“ No, my boy, it does not. You are not a fool and

I am not a fool, and neither of us believes that fortunes are made by picking up pins and bits of string. The whole art of business lies in the knowledge of men. Your job in life is to sell calico, but you had better realise once and for all that it is not a knowledge of calico that matters but knowledge of the people who are going to buy it. There is an enormous amount of cant talked about trade. No man can sell something his customer is sure he doesn't want ; the whole art consists first in finding out what your customer *thinks* he wants and then in persuading him that he wants it badly and from you. The best salesman I ever met was a German Jew who knew nothing at all about cotton goods but everything about South Americans. We were young apprentices in a London warehouse. Strumbach was the fellow's name. To-day he's the richest merchant in Manchester. He was a better man of business than Shylock. He was not content to talk with you, walk with you, and so forth ; he would eat with you, drink with you and pray with you, and never leave you from your getting up to your lying down. Whenever we had rich *rastas* from Rio or Buenos Ayres old Salomon, our employer, would give Strumbach a handful of sovereigns and *carte blanche*. 'Where they dine you dine ; where they sleep, you sleep,' he would say. 'Mind I want no account, and I don't care what the price of the champagne, but I look to you to bring them to my office and to see that no other house gets so much as a smell at 'em.' With the knowledge that Strumbach had his men under lock and key old Salomon could sleep soundly. Sometimes the young Jew would ask for an additional pound or two ; more often he would hand old Salomon some small change, which

would be gravely accepted. I do not think he ever cheated the old man."

"Honour among Jews," I said.

"Exactly. They are the most honourable race in the world. There will be no need for you to pursue the same tactics in the way of treating."

"I hope not," I said priggishly.

"For the reason that we do not deal with the foreign customer direct. Strumbach does that, and we sell to him."

"But is all business a matter of treating?" I asked.

"All business, no," replied my uncle gravely, "only the most profitable. You will have enough to do to study your English customers. Some like you to shake hands with 'em, others loathe it. Some enjoy being toadied to, others despise it. You will have to learn when to offer a cigar and when to accept one, to be ready to drink and tell stupid stories, to be slick and smart or ponderous and reliable. You must be ready to go to the stake for somebody else's political persuasions and to be enthusiastic about things you care nothing at all for. You will have to take tickets for preposterous charities, and it is well now and again to ask a man you know to be purse-proud to subscribe to some pet scheme of your own."

"But doesn't all this amount to prostitution?" I said in horror. In any lesser state of amazement I had boggled at the word.

"You can call it what you like," he replied. "Of course it is deplorable. Very, very deplorable." He shook his head. "But you've got to sell calico, and I'm telling you the way to sell it."

"But don't they see through you?"

“When they are not fools, they do; and then, if you are not a fool you drop it.”

“‘To thine own self be true . . .’” I began.

“And you won’t be false to the other fellow,” concluded my uncle approvingly. “But, my dear nephew, isn’t that assuming that your own self will be *persona grata* with Tom, Dick and Harry? Also that they care two pins whether you are false to them or not? I don’t quite know what you are talking about maybe, but it is certainly not salesmanship. If you think you can dominate the market all well and good; my advice was for a beginner who has to elbow his way through. However, all that is merely the general consideration; to-morrow we’ll make a start. I’m going to engage a new manager to replace your father at the mill. I want Buckley’s manager—Absalom Buckley is our chief rival—and I want him badly. I’ve made up my mind to offer three hundred; he’s worth five. I’ve put an advertisement in the paper and taken care that Temple knows who it is that’s advertising: ‘Wanted by a well-known firm of manufacturers’ and ‘Remuneration according to results.’ That fetches ’em. There’ll be a dozen applicants for the place and Temple among ’em.”

“How do you know Temple will be among them, uncle?”

“Because I know my man. Good-night, my boy, and pleasant dreams.”

And so, disturbed, to bed.

On the way to the office my uncle expounded to me the whole art of engaging servants, even highly paid ones.

“You advertise,” he said, “not because you can’t find what you want but to widen your choice. Even

when you've spotted your man it is as well to advertise ; it puts the fear of competition into him. Then you arrange for him to come up for interview at the same time as the others. That puts the individual fear into him. I have known hundreds a year thrown away through spacing your interviews. Have 'em all together, keep 'em waiting, and go through the batch as slow as you like. And if there is a man you want keep him till the end."

"Isn't that rather cruel?" I ventured.

"All business is cruel. The official receiver isn't any easier with you because you've paid higher wages than your competitors."

In the ante-room were gathered a dozen typical Lancashire men of business. They seemed to me hard-headed ; they were certainly hard-hatted, ill-dressed, undersized, common little fellows. They had the courage of their ready-made bows. One or two wore corduroy trousers. Both their hair and their manners seemed to have been newly oiled and there hung about them an atmosphere of common soap and honesty.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said my uncle. "Ah, Mr Temple, how do you do?"

Temple, a tall, broad-shouldered, roughish-made man dressed in neat black replied without trace of nervousness that he did well.

And then the interviews began. To me it seemed a humiliating process. The applicants cringed and fawned as though they relied upon a success of ingratiating rather than their qualifications for the post. My uncle put them through a regular cross-examination, and under the friendliest and most confidential guise proceeded to extract from them the maximum amount of

information as to his competitors' businesses. We had dispatched three when an office boy came in bearing a card which my uncle read and threw over to me. It ran :

"I shall wait another five minutes.—JOHN TEMPLE."

My uncle gave orders for him to be admitted.

As soon as the door was closed behind him the big man said : "I think we can do without t'others, Mr Reuben."

"Perhaps," said my uncle, smiling. "Well, Temple, I don't believe in beating about the bush. How much less than three hundred ?"

"I'm getting four where I am," said Temple slowly, "what with bonuses and one thing and another, and I shanna tak' four."

"No ?" said my uncle affably. "And I'm sure I shan't offer it,"

"Now, Mr Reuben," said the other, "let's talk fair. You don't like beating about t' bush and I don't know as it pleases me noather. I want five pun' a week and I'm baan t' hev it."

"But that's only two hundred and fifty," said my uncle, "and I'm willing to stretch a bit. Say three hundred for a good man."

"You'll have to stretch a lot more than that, I'm thinking!" said the other. "You know as well as me whether I'm your man or not. Five pun' a week and fix my own bonus, is my price."

"What!" cried my uncle. "Fix your own bonus! What in heaven's name do you mean?"

"What I say, and no more and no less. Fix my own

bonus. That's what I want and what I'm going to get, or John Temple doesn't take over. I shall know how much you make, and how much on it is due to me, and how much you can afford. I shallna cheat thee. John Temple has never rogued a boss yet and he's not going to start now."

"But it's preposterous," said my uncle. "How can I enter into a written undertaking to give you an unknown sum? I do not say," he went on reflectively, "that certain fixed emoluments and a system of percentages might not——"

He tailed off lamentably under the other's steady eye.

"I never trust anything as is written," said Temple slowly. "A man's word with me, boss or no boss, has to be as good as his bond."

My uncle nodded approvingly. "Certainly, certainly. A very proper view."

"I want no engagement and no undertakings. And I'll have nowt to do with emoluments and systems as you call 'em. I want plain wages and a bonus. My wages weekly and my bonus reg'lar, good years and bad. Though I don't say as I shan't want more in good years than in t'others."

"But the idea of fixing it yourself!" objected my uncle, pale at the lack of precedent and the danger he saw of creating one.

"Fix 'em myself. Yes," Temple nodded slowly and ruminatively. "But I'll be fair and give you an idea in advance. I reckon that all told I shall want five hundred in bad years and six hundred in good, and I reckon too as they'll all be good."

"It's too much," said my uncle firmly. "Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you, Temple. Four hundred

pounds a year, paid weekly, and fifty pounds every Christmas morning good years and bad. And that's my very last word."

"And I've said mine, Mr Reuben. Ye can be going on with your interviews. I wish ye good morning."

He turned to the door.

"There's not all that hurry," said my uncle, "I might consider the matter again and you might like to think it over. As a fair man, Temple, you must surely see my difficulty. I have no safeguard as to what you might not demand in the case of an abnormally prosperous year."

"I reckon any man ought to be glad to pay for abnormal prosperity," replied the other. "I've done my considering and that's all that matters to me. When I leave this room I don't come back again. I don't ask for no engagements and you don't need no safeguards, as you call 'em. Not the way I see it, you don't. If, come Christmas, you don't want me the next year you're under no compulsion to pay me my bonus. I've got a bit o' brass as I've saved, besides that what my feyther left me. I'm none married and it all goes into t' stocking. I've got between six and seven thousand and I shallna miss an odd hundred. I'll lend you some o' my brass if you want," he concluded.

"I'll take five thousand at four and a half," said my uncle.

"You will not, Mr Reuben," replied Temple, without rudeness. "Is it to be yea or nay about the job?"

"Why do you want to leave Buckley's?" my uncle asked sharply. "I hear they've not been doing any too well lately."

“Ye’ve heard nowt o’ t’ sort,” replied the other. “Buckleys’ stink o’ brass, and the only reason they go on is to keep their cottages filled and to find a living for their workfolk. When the old man dies they’ll stop. Young Buckley never had much brains, and what brains he’s got he’s drinking away fast.”

“Deplorable,” said my uncle.

“Now you’re different, Mr Reuben. You’re rich, but you’re not as rich as you’d like to be. You want to make a lot more brass, and I’m the best chap to make it for thee. You know truth when you hear it. You’re a hard man, Mr Reuben, but I never heard tell as you were a fool.”

“When can you start?” said my uncle.

“Monday week,” replied Temple.

“Five pounds then, and I suppose I must trust you for the rest,” said Reuben as genially as he could.

“Them as has trusted me haven’t had much to grumble about, and I hope as they never will,” declared the other. “I’ll run that place as it should be run.” Then turning to me he added with rough courtesy: “Not any better than your poor father did, but happen as honestly. Good-morning, Mr Reuben. Morning, Master Ned.”

And he was gone.

But my uncle continued to interview and to cross-examine, to nose and to ferret, for the sheer love and advantage of nosing and ferreting.

When the last applicant had been dismissed he stroked his nose thoughtfully and scratched his thin beard.

“It’s a good rule,” he began, “when you find a man as clever as you are to get him on your side. He’s cheap, Ned, dirt-cheap, and some day we’ll give him

an interest in the concern. That is," he added, after a pause, "if he forces us to."

§ iii

But, I hear you exclaim, what is there so very terrible about Reuben Ackroyd? Where the proof of hideous and viperish malignity? Business, after all, was always known to be business.

I see that I am in for a dull chapter and that I shall not be able to avoid a more exact account of the spider's web; that there is need for me to be explanatory and, God helping, entertaining on the subject of the cotton trade. A pious hope as to which I cherish few illusions. Since even the great Frenchman could fail to make amusing the inner mysteries of poor César's *Pâte des Sultans* and *Eau carminative*, and since we are little entranced with Chardon's efforts to replace rag-paper with a vegetable product (voir *Les Illusions Perdues*) what prospect have I, who have no more absorbing matter for intrigue than the threads in a piece of calico? But I was never a coward, and the plunge is the thing!

Know then, reader, that cotton cloth *is made from cotton*. Admitted that when the poor Indian shivers under his loin-cloth and demands a warmer quality, he is supplied with a plastery make-weight which we in England know as China clay. But this, alas! is not your cotton manufacturer's only *chinoiserie*. Nature has always been the aider and abettor of commercial acumen. She it is who is your true accommodator, arranging that thread spun from pure cotton shall be so brittle as to need in the honestest case wrapping in

a sheath of fermented flour, in the viler instance in a coating of baked earth which, far from having sailed the China seas, has always remained comfortably at home in Cornwall. Know further, reader, that the number of threads criss-crossing in your shirt so lovingly as to be disentangleable are yet countable. Not to the naked eye, perhaps, but to the warehouseman's. There is no salesman living who will not swear that fifteen threads of Ackroyd and Marston's best shirting are not fifteen but fifteen and a half. And have you never seen some frayed counter-jumper measuring with a piece of calico the distance between thumb and nose-end? A little reflection tells us that it is the calico which he measures and not a fraction of space known to the world even in the days when the Venus of Melos had arms; the human frame was expressly designed to establish the measure of the yard. What idle talk is this! you exclaim; a yard is a yard all the world over. *Not in the cotton trade.* I am too weary of it all, and you, dear lady, now stifling an elegant yawn will not insist that I should precise how many inches there may be in a cotton manufacturer's three feet. Sufficient for you to know that in this little space may be contained an infinity of pettifogging fraud. What it is important for you to realise is that my uncle never descended to obvious chicane. He was to be hated, not despised; a rogue but no cheat. His fingers were round throats rather than in pockets; whatever there was to be said of his conscience, in the pilfering sense his hands were clean.

And here I must explain that the business of Ackroyd and Marston was divided into two parts. There was first the actual turning of raw cotton into piece goods,

which complicated operation took place in the mill at Crawley Bridge. (You will find Crawley Bridge on any map. It nestles close under the lee of the Cheshire hills and has Ashton-under-Lyne for near neighbour.) The conduct of this business was irreproachable, and it was under cover of his Crawley Bridge reputation for honesty that my uncle built up the shadier half of his fortune. The management of the mill had always been in my father's hands; what we called "the Manchester end" in those of my uncle. Now the Manchester end was nothing more nor less than an agency for the sale of cloth manufactured by the small concerns of Stockport, Oldham, Blackburn and Bury. At the time of which I write there were in these towns a number of small sheds run on family lines. Whilst the big mill at Crawley Bridge contained over two thousand looms, the small sheds to which I allude would contain less than a hundred. Each would be held on a rent, together with the power by which the looms were turned, by some former overlooker who had managed to put by some small savings. He would be his own manager, foreman and warehouseman, and find his weavers among his children and near relatives. It was no unusual thing for the owner's wife to work loom to loom with her mother and with his. It was the custom of such small owners to place themselves in the hands of a Manchester agent with a confidence approaching that of young blood in its sympathetic money-lender. He was their stay and prop in all time of financial trouble. Upon the agent! Let us our lives, our souls, our debts, our careful wives, our children and our liabilities lay on the agent, was the nightly prayer of the small manufacturers. My uncle exploited them royally.

In his many lectures to me Reuben would lay it down that the rôle of agent demanded the extremes of tact and diplomacy. My own shorter view was that it was one of monstrous duplicity. Mark that my uncle was always at pains to explain to his small manufacturer that he was acting solely as his go-between and not as a profiteering middleman. "I am a Commission Agent," he would say, "and live by my commission. I take no profits. 'Is not the labourer,'" etc. It was this attitude which enabled him to offer the manufacturer nineteen shillings for a piece of calico which he, my uncle, had already sold for twenty. The rough fellow offering feeble protest, Reuben would take a turn round the Exchange and come back with a long face and the regret that his customer would not budge. Did the wretch insist that he was being shorn a trifle too close and that the weather was really very cold, my uncle might, if he had lunched well, come back from his apocryphal tour with an extra threepence. Note that in either case he made ninepence or a shilling above his lawful commission.

I still possess a letter in which he laid down the laws governing the whole duty and responsibility of the agent in the case in which the agency is genuine. I think that at one time he contemplated a monograph on the subject. It is a thousand pities that he never carried the project to completion; he had the mastermind. The particular letter which I am about to quote was written at the seaside, and shows how the man of genius may rise superior to his environment. It is admirably precise and shows no trace of preparation, neither is there in it a single correction. I give it as indicating the natural simmerings of that active brain.

“ A few general considerations, my dear boy, which
“ may be useful to you, and which occurred to me this
“ morning whilst listening to the band.

“ The interest of an agent lies in keeping friends
“ with the manufacturer whom he represents and the
“ merchant to whom he sells. He may be said to hold
“ the balance between two contending forces; he is
“ the common ambassador at two rival courts. When
“ matters go well his rôle is easy; when they go ill he
“ needs all the resourcefulness of the diplomat. Few
“ people can have friendly feelings towards those who
“ say to them: ‘ You are in the wrong.’ It is not in
“ human nature to like that sort of thing, and there-
“ fore the agent must be careful to maintain a strict
“ neutrality, to be content with *representing* the manu-
“ facturer’s views to the merchant and the merchant’s
“ views to the manufacturer. It is not the agent who
“ makes bad cloth; it is the manufacturer. It is not
“ the agent who refuses to take delivery of the bad
“ cloth; it is the merchant. The agent, protesting to
“ the merchant against his action, transmits to the
“ manufacturer the merchant’s refusal to accept the
“ cloth. The agent, protesting to the manufacturer
“ against the badness of his cloth, insists on the mer-
“ chant fulfilling his purchase. And the reason for
“ this is plain. If A., who holds one end of the stick,
“ succeeds in an action at law in recovering damages
“ from B., the agent, who stands in the middle, so,
“ too, must B. be able to succeed in a similar action
“ against C., who holds the stick at the other end.
“ And *vice versa*. Note that the second action must
“ always include the costs of the first. Now in neither
“ of these actions would the verdict be gained on the

“bare contract alone, but also on consideration of the protests, complaints, objections and acknowledgments which had passed throughout the whole of the negotiations and transactions. And unless B.’s relations to C. in reference to these protests, complaints, etc., were the same as A.’s relations to him, he, B., might not be able to recover from C. what he had lost to A. And *vice versa*.

“Therefore, my dear nephew, it is imperative that you should do no more than represent with absolute clarity the views of each end of the stick to the other, keeping accurate record of all statements, proposals, etc. Otherwise your stick-ends are likely to turn into upper and nether mill-stones and you one day to find yourself horribly bruised.

“Your aunt is well, and I am about to take her for a walk along the sea-front. The breeze is westerly and the evening should be pleasant.”

Plain as a pikestaff, isn’t it, and eloquent of all that dodging and paltering which is commerce? . . . Faugh!

Let me now proceed to the reconstruction of certain commercial aphorisms which my uncle was never tired of delivering.

I

No man goes into business “for the benefit of his health,” nor yet to safeguard the health of others.

II

The agent is the master of ceremonies at a bout of wits. On his right the Producer. On his left the Consumer. Seconds out of the ring and himself to slip under the ropes at his nimblest.

III

“The buyer hath need of a thousand eyes.” It is probable that he will use them all and borrow the seller’s single one into the bargain.

IV

It is good tactics to give half-an-ounce over measure. But always exact the full ounce in your turn.

Most Machiavellian of all, my uncle’s *flair* for inherently weak and shaky concerns, and his method of absorbing and appropriating them. He would begin by weaving round the tottering structure a web of blandest prosperity. He would provide, whatever the state of trade and out of his own pocket, a run of profitable orders until such time as he had succeeded in getting himself appointed sole agent—an easy thing when the agent is pouring money into the pockets of a principal who is also a simpleton. Then when the misguided fellow had shorn himself of all other connections and supports and was under the tightest obligation to seek none, he would find his trade suddenly disappear. My uncle would be able to find none but unprofitable orders, unprofitable to his principal that is ; would hold out hope and encouragement, and hoping and encouraging would bleed and bleed and bleed. Next the constitution of himself as chief creditor, and then, like a ripe plum, the bright little, tight little business would fall into his mouth. Oh, he was magnanimous, was my uncle, and it was not unusual for him to employ his broken bankrupt as

manager in what had been his own concern at considerably less than he was worth.

It may be asked why the small manufacturers of Lancashire did not fight shy of this voracious and all-devouring altruist. The following maxims apply :

v

The kite has no need of an infinity of prey. The essential thing is that the prey should not all inhabit the same field.

vi

The world is small, but Lancashire is big.

I had been learning the business of a cotton manufacturer at small places under my uncle's thumb—weaver at one, "slasher" at another, overlooker at a third, in the office at a fourth—for some considerable time before I realised that all Reuben's kindly questionings as to the prosperity of the friendly folk who sheltered me were so many evilly disposed soundings, that he was using me as the most ingenious of spies.

I agree with you, madam. A dull chapter.

§ iv

But I am getting on too fast. I was not put to my apprenticeship in the little towns of Lancashire until I had made myself master of the haggling and huxtering which constitute the essence of trade. My notion of the man of business was, and is still, that of the tapster turned bagman. I did my best, I have always

done my best, to preserve the same attitude towards those who would sell to me as towards those to whom I seek to sell. But the thing's impossible; or at least it is certainly not normal. The buyer blusters and bullies, the seller fawns and cringes. There are riotous exceptions and inversions, of course. I have known buyers apt to abasement, and sellers who could lash themselves to fury; I have witnessed humiliating encounters between two of the cringing fraternity, mutually fair speaking, Greek meeting Greek, and both giving shameful ground; and I have been an amused spectator at battles royal, German running full tilt against a kindred stomach. I have no views upon alien and peaceful invasion and merely record the fact that three-quarters of the Manchester shipping trade is done in broken English. My uncle was never tired of a yarn concerning Strumbach's one defeat. Invaded in his sanctum by a salesman upright on his forks—consciousness in Whose image he is made gives even the poorest of these creatures a certain temerity—the great Jew, with many guttural garnishings, demanded to know whom the wretch represented. To which the timorous fellow, mastering his terror as best he might and tendering his employers' card, stutteringly replied: "These b-b-bastards!" To Strumbach's credit let it be recorded that the ripost marked the beginning of a lifelong "connection."

Perseverance was one of my uncle's pet themes. On summer evenings after dinner he would be inspired by the fragrance of the garden and the beauty of descending night to some such phrase as:

"Success, my boy, depends less upon ability than upon persistence and steady plodding."

“Patience is a weary mare,” I would reply.

“Well put, nephew; well put. Many a brilliant advocate owes his first success to being found in his chamber killing flies with a ruler when better men than he have gone to the Grand National. The office stool’s the thing.”

From which I deduce :

VII

Success to be a matter of glue rather than gumption, of buttocks rather than brains.

But, contrariwise :

VIII

Orders not to be valued by the amount of shoe-leather expended to obtain them.

Some day I shall write a treatise on the exaggerated idea of the nobility of trade. I find little force in the objection that the world would get on ill without it. Equally the world would get on ill without scavengers and drains, yet few look for beauty in a sewer. To deal is not noble in itself. To fabricate where the beauty of material is considered and utilised is an honourable calling; to trade in the produce of another man’s brains, whether that produce be sonatas or calicoes, is a dishonourable calling. At its highest trade can never be more than the science of distribution. To look down upon the shopkeeper as shopkeeper betrays the snob; to despise him for his bated breath and whispering humbleness is the mark of the true aristocrat. Hear, therefore, two aphorisms of my own :

IX

The aristocrat is nearly always useless and often dangerous. But at least he has a feeling for dignity.

X

The aristocrat meets the whole world on his own plane. Since death and the horse are your only levellers, it follows that the only trades proper to the nobility are the undertaker's and the horse-dealer's.

There was an understanding at Oakwood that if business only was talkable at the dinner-table, the proper matter for the drawing-room was the novels of eminent Nonconformists. In our immediate circle English literature was confined to the genius of a lady to whose least outpouring the high minded *National Conscience* found itself unable to do justice under two closely written columns. You can imagine the disturbance created in the social atmosphere when some adventurous hen, fluttering from tea-table to tea-table, first brought news of a London writer's realistic and non-romantic treatment of the seduction of a servant girl. Now, I have listened to as much distressful cackle as any other youngster brought up in the provinces, but I search my memory in vain for any parallel to the avalanche of inept and futile criticism occasioned by this honest book. The mothers of our race, bearing the new generation in their womb, would ask each other not whether the book was true or beautiful, nor yet what might conceivably be done to remedy the state of affairs exposed. They said flatly that if such things were, they, "for one," did

not want to hear about them; and that if they could help it, neither should anyone else hear about them.

“I’m surprised at the libraries,”—it is my old friend the Gadgett speaking, the while she strains at her cerements and nods a woeful plume. “They should know better than to allow such books to cross their counters. Nowadays I have to forbid my girls to look at so much as a fly-leaf until I have perused the book myself. If it isn’t servant girls it’s farming maids. I’m sure it’s a miracle our daughters remain pure. It is enough to make one ask what the world is coming to.”

“Its senses perhaps?” I ventured.

Horatia bridled.

“Or would you suggest some form of index?” I went on, having made some study of the subject for a debate at a Mutual Improvement Society of which my Cousin Geoffrey was an ardent and whistling supporter. I said no more and lay in wait for the good soul.

“The Index Expurgatorius,” began the catafalque, “has, I hear, done good work in France. I look upon it as atoning for their most unfortunate Revolution.”

“It was a Spanish idea, surely—not French?” I risked.

“And as a compensation vouchsafed to the inhabitants of that misguided country,” she went on undisturbed.

“I should say that it is not the country that matters, but the principle,” squeaked a Miss Limpkin, an indefatigable though ineffectual trimmer of her lamp.

“Very well, ladies,” I began in my best debating manner, “I will take you in any country you like. Do you know that the *Index generalis scriptorum*

interdictorum, first published in the sixteenth century and continued almost to the present day, proscribed the whole of Balzac, the most famous work of Victor Hugo, both the Dumas, and even that poor old thing Georges Sand." At twenty one can be very severe.

"Novelists!" said Horatia, with infinite scorn.

"And Montaigne and Pascal and the *Fables* of La Fontaine," I went on. "Do you know that the diet of London proscribed Wycliffe and even *Paradise Lost*?"

"It was certainly a foolish thing to do," said Miss Limpkin. "The author might have been annoyed and then we should never have known how paradise was to be regained."

"Perhaps you are not aware, ma'am," I continued, "that the cardinal in charge of the Index made a good thing out of releasing books at so much a time?"

"Nothing that a Papist could do would surprise me," said the Gadgett.

"Or that until recently Copernicus and Galileo were considered mischievous? Or that in Catholic countries to this day the Bible itself is prohibited?"

"I really think," interrupted my aunt who disliked any "dragging-in" of the Bible, "that we should allow each country to decide what is best for itself. We must be broad-minded."

"We must, indeed," sighed the Limpkin.

"If ever I thought that one of my girls was to grow up a Liz of the Liza-Lu's, or whatever you call them, I would rather see her dead in her coffin." And the widow of the Rector of St Euphorbius's looked as though she meant it.

"Surely," said Monica, who was beginning to grow up, "Mary or Dorothy might be allowed to judge of

that herself. Grave-clothes are so unbecoming. I simply can't see Dorothy in a shroud."

"Monica," said my aunt with apparent severity, "there are subjects for levity and subjects in which Mrs Gadgett is good enough to take a great interest. I desire that you should not confuse the two."

"Very well, mamma," replied Monica, with a highly impertinent simulation of meekness. She understood her mother admirably.

"Don't say 'Very well, mamma,' to me," retorted my aunt. "Go to the piano and play Mrs Gadgett and Miss Limpkin your *Gipsy Rondo*."

"Certainly, mamma," said Monica, and dashed off into the "Diddle *diddle*, diddle *diddle*, diddle *dum*, *dum dee*!" of that detestable piece.

My first intimations of sex, then, came to me as an ugly, leering mystery. Often I would walk about the streets at night fascinated by those shawled, silent shadows creeping along the walls of our great warehouses. Once I found a poor drab weeping in her apron, and I spoke to her. She told me that her little brother had died that afternoon and that she was relying upon the next two evenings to bury him. I gave the girl what few shillings I had and walked away, asking myself how much the Gadgetts and the Limpkins and probably the Bishop of the Diocese and the local Member of Parliament knew about life. I doubted whether my aunt's remedy in like case would have gone beyond a "sound" talking-to.

I found a similar absence of understanding of the realities in the ministrations at the little chapel which my uncle ran as systematically as he did his business. As the wealthiest member of the congregation he was

often chairman of the committee, and when not chairman the power behind the chair. It was suggested by Minchin the bootmaker that I should act as secretary, "to give the young gentleman a wider outlook in affairs." "Affairs" was indeed the right word, our very creed wearing the air of a prospectus. "One God, no devil, and twenty shillings in the pound," it ran. The building contained an altar, but it was an altar "without trappings," and the minister wore a tightly buttoned frock-coat with a waiter's white bow. There was no authorised form of service and I had to sit—we did not kneel—through improvisations which had no distinguishable beginning or middle and which drew with the greatest difficulty to an end. I learnt to measure time by the length of diffuse sermons indifferently phrased and of meagre momentum, in which thanks would be returned for philosophers the preacher had never read and for poets who could only have mystified him. Exhortation abounded to avoid things which were not within the experience of the preacher, and it was rare that a sermon drew to a close without a reference to the advisability of marching breast-forward never doubting clouds would break. The literary touch.

The whole atmosphere of the chapel was chill and unbeautiful. There was no colour in the windows save the stains of fog and dirt; the choir was composed of giggling young ladies from the millinery stores; the Sunday school superintendent, hungry after an early breakfast, would devour ham sandwiches during the lessons and eject offending gristle into the aisle. The chapel was situated in a district of mean and dingy squalor, and I do not recollect that we ever attracted a stranger or that we had more influence on the neigh-

bourhood than a pillar-box. It is true that we instituted a society for the reclaiming of the irreclaimable, but the only fish that came into our net were half-a-dozen guileless souls whose only failings were consumption and underfeeding. We prayed for the blackguard without ever getting into touch with him, and even had we done so I firmly believe that we should have taken him by the shoulders and put him outside.

Monica was active but septic. "I don't quite see," she would say, with a touch of her father's intonation, "that we are doing Any Good. I come home from meetings very tired, but the only benefit to anybody seems to be that I sleep well afterwards. Dealing with the poorer classes isn't easy. You know the Higgins woman and how dirty her babies always are. The only way I could get to their heads to wash them to-day was by giving Mrs Higgins half-a-crown and sending her to the public-house. And there she'll stop all day. I don't for a minute suppose she'll come home sober. And so to-night her husband will thrash her, and then the poor babies will catch it. By the way, Ned, I want an old pair of trousers. Higgins has drunk his."

That was Monica all over. She would have left me without a shirt.

The chapel was never in touch with the life that surrounded it; we might just as well have met together in the middle of the Sahara. When the minister "received a call elsewhere" the committee would invite tenders and offer a guinea and third-class return fare for a couple of trial sermons. And by these sermons, together with the impression produced on the influential members of the flock at whose houses the

candidate had dined and supped, was the choice of shepherd decided. I look back upon my share in these negotiations with infinite disgust. To think that I have been instrumental in beating down some poor devil from a hundred and twenty a year to a hundred and ten! To think that some half-starved fisher of men should have been constrained to bait his hook for me with deference and servility!

Three Sundays in the year were accorded to the minister in which to make holiday. I have never doubted that he took advantage of them to earn three extra guineas as "relief." In the absence of the parson the services were conducted by—my uncle! What charivari then of commercial astuteness and artless blasphemy! I cull:

XI

Since we are without information as to the Good Samaritan's means we cannot judge of his degree of generosity.

Since we are not told whether the widow's rent was paid we cannot be sure that the mite was hers to give.

No man has the right to be generous at the expense of his creditors. Even the disciple must cut his coat according to his cloth.

XII

"And they straightway left their nets, and followed him."

The morality of this proceeding depends upon the fishermen having no business engagements.

§ v

After a short apprenticeship to the trade of subservience I was allowed to make my bow to Strumbach. This huge German would have been a leading figure in any English city. He was at the centre of our many activities; he presided over the Goethe Society, and largely guaranteed that series of classical concerts which has helped to make the Englishman's reputation for musical taste; there was no charity he did not handsomely support, and no public subscription list that he did not head. But many were the stories told of highly placed employees dismissed at a moment's notice. It was said that during a dinner-party at the house of his confidential secretary to whom he paid the princely salary of two thousand a year he had waved a fat, amiable hand, and exclaimed: "I am Otto Strumbach und I haf no bartner. Vy should ze firm not begom Strumbach and Gompany?" And the secretary had beamed. That night Otto slept ill, his astuteness always most awake in the small hours. The following morning he sent for his second.

"I haf been zinking, Mr Scholtz," he said, "zat nod even mit ze two zousand a year of salary vat I gif you, haf you been able to buy all zose vonderful pictures zat you haf in your house, und to zend zose so fine boys of yours to Oxford. I myself haf my son Rupert zere, und vat he costs, alone his father knows. Ve vill not make a bartnership if you blease; but ve vill dissolve mit one anoizzer. At ze end of ze year for ze salary; bot you leaf mine house zis very day."

Other stories there were of six, nine months', a year's holiday accorded to ailing clerks, with seaside expenses

paid and an allowance for wife and family. Like all great men, Otto was single-minded and ruthless in his single-mindedness. His purpose achieved he could afford to be human. He paid enormous salaries but insisted upon complete devotion. "Zay shall haf no ozzer gods but Otto," he proclaimed openly. He kept an inventory of his employees' families with tables of their salaries and probable expenses. Of a dashing young clerk disporting himself in kid gloves of a cabriolet yellow he asked simply :

"Vy ?"

"To keep my hands warm, sir," answered the exquisite.

"Voollen vuns, my boy, voollen vuns!" the old man purred.

He had an elaborate system of espionage and knew the haunts and habits of his men. An occasional orgy or debauch he would forgive, but not a steady addiction to music, the theatre, or any art soever. An outbreak of viciousness was pardonable, a persistent hobby put you beyond the commercial pale.

"Youth most haf his fling," he would say, "und he works all ze better afterwards. But my clerks must haf no interest vich gompetes mit me."

Otto's normal expression was one of childlike simplicity, and there was something burly about the whole man which reminded you of a good-tempered bear. He was always perfectly tailored, and in matters outside his business you could call him a gentleman. As we walked across to Otto's office my uncle spoke with pride of having been kicked down his stairs for three consecutive years of three hundred morning visits each before getting his first order. This excessive

mistrust was largely due, my uncle considered, to their having been clerks together in London. Otto was thought to be getting on towards his second million.

“Does he never intend to spend any of it?” I asked. “He must be getting old.”

“He adds to it,” said Reuben, “and he likes adding.”

I enlarged on what was, at that time, a pet theory of mine; a theory to the effect that a man is morally entitled to do only so much money-grubbing as will afford him a competence.

“And then?” queried Reuben.

“Give the world back something of what it has given him.” I spouted.

“Meaning what, exactly?”

“Beautiful books, beautiful pictures.”

“But suppose a man has no capacity for repaying the world in those high-flown ways? Mind, I do not agree as to the necessity for repayment.”

“Give to the poor,” I answered, and I confess that the remark did not sound as convincing as I should have liked. I continued to enlarge on the theme. I laid down the principle that money should be the spur and not the collar and the trace.

“There’s ambition as well as money, you know,” said Reuben.

“Who wants to sell more calico than ever he has sold before?” I asked superbly.

“Otto does,” replied my uncle.

“He’s an artist then?”

Reuben shrugged his shoulders. At the door of the magnificent, palatial-looking warehouse, for there was nothing mean about the German, he stopped a moment.

“Otto will be sure to buy something from you to give you a start,” he said. “I know he is open for another line of our Crawley Shirting. The price is twenty shillings, delivery as he likes, but I shall leave the bargaining to you; get more if you can. But whatever price you agree upon, he will want it dividing. That is to say, if you fix the price at twenty shillings he will want half the order booking at nineteen and half at twenty-one.”

“Why?” I asked.

“So that he can show our competitors the cheaper of the two contracts. ‘Ackroyd’s price is nineteen shillings,’ he will then tell them. We establish the price and that forces the others to sell at it.”

“But suppose he did the same thing with other manufacturers, and showed you their contracts? You wouldn’t believe him.”

“He doesn’t do it with anybody else. We lead, you know.”

“But that’s dishonest,” I urged.

“We’re here anyhow,” said Reuben. “We can talk about that another time.”

We passed the inky watch-dogs and the scribbling sentinels without difficulty. Arrived at the private office Reuben tapped familiarly at the door, opened it a few inches, and with a curious sidling motion inserted head and one shoulder.

“Come in,” roared a voice.

We went in.

I have seen conscientious actors under the influence of a fine-felt frenzy, and great ones in the throes of a well-simulated one. I have seen Irving as Shylock and Salvini as Othello. I have been with Balzac in the

cabinet of the banker Nucingen. But never have I seen energy and passion raised to Otto's dæmonic power. He had the fervour of the disciple, the obstinacy of the fanatic, the ecstasy of the martyr. His whole soul was on fire. *He was selling.* Caught in the terrible Jewish toils the customer by his side quaked and quivered, submitting with as good grace as he might to the pawing of his cheeks and the pulling of his beard by the big man's well-cared-for, fleshy hand.

"Come in," roared Otto. "There are no secrets in mine house," and he turned again to the client.

"That is because this particular customer doesn't buy our goods," whispered my uncle, with a jerk of the thumb towards Otto's victim.

"Sevenpence a yard," shouted Otto, "und I haf no more time mit you zis day. Zese gentlemen——" And he turned to us.

But the customer had still a kick left in him. He pulled Otto by the coat-sleeve. He whined that sevenpence was a price which in theory he was prepared to pay, but that he wanted better value for the money.

"Bring me ze next quality, please, Mr Ransom, *ze-vun-zat-is-better-zan-zis.* Zo," he said slowly and with intention to a youth standing at his side and who appeared to be in the grip of some unholy fascination. The young man retreated to the door, his eyes fixed on Otto's as though in hypnotic trance.

"To-morrow," said Otto, again turning to his customer, "I zend flowers for your lady. To-night ve dine togezzer, you und madame und your loffy little girl. Vat matters vezzer you gif sevenpence or sixpence or vun shilling. Ve dine all ze same. So!"

And he rubbed his hands.

Mr Ransom reappeared. I had an impression that he came through the floor; he certainly looked much too scared to have propelled himself all the way from the door in the normal manner. He sagged at the knees.

“We have no better quality, sir,” he said.

Otto turned to his customer and said quietly: “Zen I take your sixpence dree-farthings. Bot I gif you von dish und von bottle less mit your dinner to-night.” The bargain was clinched and the customer departed.

And now a complete change came over Strumbach as he turned to the trembling youth at his side. Devils leaped from his beady eyes and snakes in the form of words came hissing from his mouth and fell writhing on the floor at our feet. An old fakir’s trick, but then Otto was a fakir with something to sell.

“You fool,” he shouted, “you damned English fool. Ven I tell you slowly, *like zat*”—he spaced his words—“to bring me a better quality, zen vat you haf to do is to bring anoizzer piece of ze same quality und zay it is better. Gott in Himmel, but vill zay never learn business, zese English swine? I am not angry, my boy; I am not blaming you. I am just saying you are a damned fool. Vat your salary, eh?”

“Three hundred, sir,” stammered the poor fellow.

“Zen I make it dree-fifty. At dree hundred I must egspect a fool. Now out mit you.”

Poor Ransom, in whom I felt a kindred spirit, gave me a glance and I tried to tell him with my eyes that if he had his Otto, I had my Reuben. There was this difference, however, that Reuben would have reduced

the salary by fifty pounds a year, and counted it a good morning's work.

"So zis is ze young man," Strumbach said pleasantly enough and holding out his hand. "Vell, my boy, I make you veleome. How many years did I kick you down zose stairs?" He looked at my uncle.

"Three," said Reuben, without shrinking.

"Zat makes friendship," said the other. "Two is noddings; dree is kolossal. Und yet ve had worked togezzer as boys. Vonderful! Vell, Mr Edward, your uncle vill tell you zat I am now his best friend. Ven he wants to sell I buy, and ven I want to buy he must sell. You follow his example und you begom rich. Ven your uncle sell to me cheaper I buy more still, und he begomes richer zan he is. Bot he does very vell already. So!"

"Edward will sell you anything you want," said Reuben.

"At nineteen shillings I buy," said Otto.

"And at twenty shillings and sixpence I sell," I replied, with a courage which amazed me.

"Vat your uncle tell you he sell at?" asked Otto quickly.

I hesitated.

"He tell you his price twenty shillings; get more if you can. Old fox, I know him."

"My uncle has left the price to me," I said, with an assumption of dignity. "My price is twenty shillings and sixpence."

"Zen I take ten zousand," said Otto. "Bot remember zis. Venever you want to sell, you come to me. You do not go to Klein or Hoffman or Strumpf; you come to me. Bromise!"

And of course I promised.

"Five at twenty, and five at twenty-one," he said to Reuben.

Reuben nodded. We were bowed out.

At the door Otto called my uncle back for a moment and whispered to him. I overheard what he said; everything about the man was so big that a whisper was a physical impossibility.

"You are not so young as you were, and must make zings easy for yourself. Ven you vant to sell cloth zend me zat boy. I like him; he is no fool. Bot do not send your son. He called on me yesterday and talked to me of bees. I will not be talked to of bees by anybody. Gut-morning."

That night as we sat after dinner, my aunt sewing, Geoffrey biting his nails—an occupation which at least had the advantage of preventing him from whistling—my uncle looked up from his book and said suddenly: "Where's Little Dorrit?"

"What day is it?" asked my aunt.

"Thursday."

"Then she's down at Mrs Chalkley's. Friday's her day for Mrs Higgins. To-night's her night with that horrible butcher's family."

"She's a good girl, old lady."

"Monica's the sort of stuff bricks are made of," I said enthusiastically. "You can impress her mind as she makes it up, and then it just sets and she goes about the world being of use."

"She's a poor hand at ferreting," said Geoffrey; "sides with the rabbits too much."

Amongst my uncle's good points was his refusal to talk business before his daughter. Having assured

himself that she was unlikely to be in until later, he mixed a glass of weak whisky and water and began to hold forth.

“Otto Strumbach,” he said, “is the most honest merchant in Manchester.”

I made a movement.

“Don’t interrupt me, Edward ; I know what you are going to say. All honesty is relative and Otto is honest with himself. He has his code and he keeps to it.”

“But the double prices, uncle.”

“A merchant is not on oath, my boy. You’re not compelled to believe him any more than you are compelled to believe the advocate who protects the innocence of the murderous-looking ruffian in the dock. He’s a cunning fellow. He gave you a higher price than he knew he could have bought at to encourage you to give him preference over other buyers when you are really hard up for orders.”

“And then squeeze me ? ”

“Precisely.”

“Just as we squeeze the little manufacturers,” I said.

“I don’t think ‘squeeze’ is a nice word, dear,” said my aunt. “Nor do I think your tone to your uncle is quite respectful. I wonder, Reuben, that you allow Edward to cross-examine you.”

“I don’t see any harm in it, my dear,” said Reuben. “Nonsense can’t both stick in the lad’s head and come out of it at the same time. At least let’s hope not.”

“That depends upon one’s capacity for nonsense,” said Monica, bursting in upon us like a cheerful hurricane and putting an end to this vindication of a prince of commerce. “I’ve a notion that there’s such a thing

as spontaneous generation of nonsense. And if Mrs Chalkley's husband drinks any more I'm certain he will spontaneously combust. I really don't think Chalkley is a nice man. He was awfully . . . combustible . . . to-night. Swore that if I did not let him kiss me he would thrash his old woman black and blue."

Her mother looked up quickly.

"So of course I let him," continued Monica lightly. "I may not be the Duchess of Devonshire but Chalkley is certainly a butcher."

"You talk a great deal too much nonsense, my dear," said her father. "Give your mother a kiss and be off to bed."

My uncle continued for some time longer to expound the whole duty and conscience of the trader. I epitomise.

XIII

Many a mickle makes a muckle. A reputation for honesty in the mickle will help you to pass the doubtful muckle.

XIV

Take care that your pigeons have plenty of feathers and that your sheep are not short of wool. In other words, never trade with a man who has nothing to lose.

XV

A reputation for honesty is the measure of the merchant's holding in that quality. Theft is not theft until it is found out.

§ vi

And now to Ashton-under-Lyne, where my uncle had control over several concerns. Ashton is, as all the world knows, next door to Crawley Bridge, my uncle pretending to prefer that I should serve apprenticeship where I should not presume upon the advantages incidental to being the master's nephew. From the first shy advances to the four-loomed weaver who was to be my master until such time as I was fitted to be his, I was the passionate friend of every worker under the shed's dusty roof—a friendship and a passion which have lasted all my life. I am a Socialist whose Socialism has never obscured the fact that all men are not equal in the sight of man whatever they may be in the sight of God. A fine phrase, 'the sight of God'—though I doubt whether it will stand examination and whether its first user had the philosophic sense. If God's vision includes the perception of human values—and with any other interpretation the phrase is meaningless—I cannot see how He can avoid judging man except according to man's treatment of his kind. Not according to his degree of usefulness, which is a matter of talent, but according to the underlying intention. 'All men start fair in the perception of God,' I would prefer that the phrase should read. And then, only with infinite individual reservations and considerations. I take this to be profound; it may very well be childish. What I am driving at is that where there is not negation there must be energy, and amongst the manifestations of energy there must be inequality. I expect I have got the technicalities all wrong; I had never the patience for jargon. The point is that men are not equal in the

sight of man, and that it is the merest cant to pretend that they ever will be.

Socialist though I am, with a practical policy to which I have never been able to get anybody to listen—to wit, first that no man who is willing to work shall be denied the opportunity, and at a wage which will enable him to keep body and soul together, and the bodies and souls of his wife and children together *and a little bit over* ; and second that no man however hard he may have worked shall be allowed to retain more than ten times what he can possibly require to keep *his* body and soul together and the bodies and souls of his wife and children together and *a little bit over* for him too, all in strict proportion and degree—Socialist though I am, I like people in their class and according to their class, and I like them to remain in their class. I have infinite respect for the grit and perseverance of the self-made man, but I cannot see that respect is due to his offspring unless it exhibits these qualities in its turn. Thickness of hide as a single qualification I find it difficult to venerate.

Take, for instance, young Walter Buckley—“ Wally ” he was called by intimates and workpeople, though to tell the truth the line of demarcation was vague—only son of old Absalom Buckley and his inefficient heir. He comes particularly to mind as the only one of the natives with whom I was at all friendly until I met Rodd. The Buckleys were carriage folk by this time, and in addition to their son had daughters, and the daughters had highly paid maids and less highly paid language, music, drawing and deportment mistresses. Other families in the district, notably the Runnels, the Starchleys and the Rossiters had

equally expensive maids and equally half-starved governesses; together they formed a "set" which was "at home" to one another on specified days, and at the tea-tables of which young Wally would turn up not quite sober. Now old Absalom liked to bring Nonconformist customers from Manchester to dinner, and as he belonged to the old school which made a principle of not getting drunk until after that meal, he naturally objected to finding his son very imperfectly self-possessed every evening at the hour of seven. Also it must be said that when old Absalom objected to anything, he objected with that complete thoroughness on which the Lancashire man has always prided himself (see *Hindle Wakes*). With the result that Master Wally had to leave his parents' "roof." He took rooms in the house of the good lady with whom I lodged.

I dined at the Buckleys' once, partly because I could not go on refusing Wally, partly because I was often hungry, and partly because the display of vulgar wealth has always amused me. These dinners would top up with coloured ices in the shape of little pigs, giving rise to the most amiable pleasantries. It would be absurd to deny that the manners of Lancashire at this date had a charm peculiarly their own. But there was a very good reason why I should have ceased to dine at this hospitable house.

You must know that there lived in the town—I have already mentioned the family—a rich and overbearing old woman of the name of Runnel. She was the widow of the old Joe Runnel who made an enormous fortune out of waste and cop-bottoms. (What these

are I cannot stop to explain. Their particularity is unimportant ; sufficient to know that they were never yet dealt in without laying the foundation of a fortune.) Old Joe was a popular and prominent figure ; he was more, he was a " character." The little boys in the streets would go about singing rhymes in which free comment was given to his eccentricities. Any old inhabitant of the Bridge will remember those interminable verses beginning :

Old Joe Runnel
Has a belly like a tunnel,
So run and get a funnel
And pour the whisky in ;
He comes home late at night
So very, very tight
And don't he get a fright
When his Missus lets him in !

Joe was never known to take exception to his popularity, although it may be imagined to what extent ribaldry such as this grated on his wife, who had originally been a weaver but now saw herself raised by her husband's wealth to the level of the Starchleys and the Rossiters. These ladies had never seen a loom and their mothers only had been weavers. Old Joe cared nothing at all for social distinction. He was a celebrity ; he had made his pile and was quite ready to " let the young varmints mix it as they've a mind." He even had the wit to turn the familiar jingle to advantage in the municipal election in which he contested North Ward in the electric light interest against the Gas Works' stick-in-the-mud. His election address was profoundly simple. It ran :

Old Joe Runnel
With his brass could fill a tunnel,
So think of all the fun^{ll}
Come from spending all that tin,
He'll chuck it left and right
The Coal-y boys to fight
The Bridge's way to light.
So, electors, send him in !

And Reuben romped home, largely on the strength of this amiable doggerel. From all of which you will realise that the pronunciation of Old Joe's name was fairly well established. When in the fullness of time the old fellow was gathered to his fathers, his widow conceived the preposterous idea of doubling the last letter of her name and throwing the accent on the last syllable. She let it be known that she desired to be called Mrs Joseph Runnell.

For years I had cherished a grudge against this mountain of vulgarity, dating from the time when I had first been taken by my aunt and uncle to a Sunday evening's supper at "Glen Chamois." The name in itself is a revenge, but I thirsted for more. The old woman had deeply offended my dawning Socialist sense. All the world knows that a Sunday supper consists of cold beef and a jacket potato. How otherwise are the poor maids to go to church or talk with their policemen and under-gardeners ? To my horror Mrs Joe, as she was then generally called, put up her *face-à-mains*—a piece of goldsmith's ware in the Byzantine mode—and consulted a white marble slab or miniature tombstone, a *menu* (pronounced *may-new*), I suppose I should call it.

"What, I wonder"—and her air was of one accus-

toned to Royal obsequies—"is the housekeeper giving us to-night?" And an elaborate hot dinner appeared for which, at the time of the Buckleys' dinner-party, I had not forgiven her.

Here fortune aided me by placing me on Mrs Joe's "other" side. During the general pause which fore-shadows the end of dinner I turned to the portly dame visibly preening her feathers prior to withdrawal and in a voice which could be heard all down the table I said: "I regret so much, dear Mrs Runnell, that my aunt and uncle have not had the pleasure of a visit from you since old Joe . . . since poor Mr Runnell died."

"And why should you regret it, young gentleman, may I ask?"

"Because, dear lady, I should so much have enjoyed showing you round the *stabells* and *kennells*!"

It was unpardonable, I admit.

Wally burst into a loud guffaw, and his mother, picking up the women with her eyes, led the way to the drawing-room.

I do not know that looking back on the incident I am ashamed. I remember some of my father's savage outbursts. He too held the pompous in horror, and what's bred in the bone—

Poor Wally. His was an entirely dreadful existence. At twenty-seven he was completely bald, and to this day I can see the way his glistening scalp would move up and down in terror of his father and of life in general. He was the typical industrial cretin, which is quite a different thing from the *crétin noble* of high society. Fun there was to be got out of him, but it was the fun of teasing an idiot boy. Let me instance his account of a visit to the play.

Irving had appeared in Manchester in a travesty, probably by Sardou, of the life of Dante, and the occasion was one for a general sallying forth on the part of the Buckley family, the girls in diamonds and Wally in a clean collar. The male part of the Lancashire back-bone does not dress for the theatre.

“ I don’t think much to that there Dant,” he said, sheering the poet’s name of a syllable.

“ To what ? ” said I.

“ D-a-n-t,” he replied, “ that what’s being played at the Theatre Royal. But then I haven’t read the novel ! ”

There was nothing in Wally of the angry satisfaction of the self-made man savaging a world which has not always been subservient to him. He had none of that fine masterfulness which marked old Absalom, the masterfulness of the incident of the sofa. This was a piece of furniture in the window of a fashionable shop in King Street, which had taken the eye of old Buckley’s lady.

“ The piece forms part of a suite, sir, and I am afraid cannot be sold separately,” said the obsequious attendant.

“ I don’t want the suite, young man ; I want that di-van ! ”

“ I am sorry, sir, but I am afraid we cannot separate them.”

“ Who the hell’s asking you to separate ’em ? ” roared old Buckley. “ Do as you’re bid, young man, and pack up that bloody di-van. I suppose I can pay for the whole spindle-shanked lot if I want. You can sell the rest of the sticks where you like and credit me with aught as they fetch, seeing as you’re that particular.

My missus wants that di-van and by the Holy Moses she shall have it."

Wally would spend his whole day in the office making out wage calculations, which were nearly always wrong. His evenings he spent at the "Loom and Shuttle," emptying pot after pot of rifty ale. At ten o'clock he would be quarrelsome; at eleven, maudlin. At a quarter past I would hear him come into the lodgings; and at half-past he would be sick. There is a famous passage in one of Zola's novels in which a drunken beast falls asleep in his own vomit. There are few moods in which the queasy Englishman has stomach for literary truth as the Frenchmen present it; I confess that for me the moods were rare indeed in which I found the actual spectacle less than discouraging. . . . On the other hand it must be admitted that Wally was kind to children. I could never be bothered with the landlady's little brats; Wally would bring them toys and sit up with them when they were ill. There are contradictions in life which defy resolution.

CHAPTER III

§ i

AND then I fell in love. A theme only for the writer who is teased with a liking for the prettier side of truth. Why, I wonder, should it be necessary to weave tasteful little veils for that great illusion which Nature has invented to serve her purpose? All men are alike in this, that their passions are for the most part transient, secondary affairs, and that they refuse to admit it. Shakespeare is our most tremendous dealer in this trifle, and mark how clearly he scorns it. Hamlet's passion for Ophelia—a concession to the groundlings. Macbeth's for his lady—she should have died hereafter. Lear with some ancient crone to keep him within doors—think not on't. Othello—a big baby. There are no lovers in Shakespeare other than elegants teased by an interlude and gormandisers fooled to the top of a strumpet's bent. Romeo is perhaps the lover after my own heart, agog for Rosaline and dying for her successor out of sheer youthfulness. Above all I dislike the trick love has of putting on a mask of devotion, and I fear the protective colouring of passion even more than its satiety. All real passion is surrender; by the woman of her body, by the man of every other thing he holds dear. Honour, reputation, work, friendship, your devout lover will lay them all at what the poor fool takes to be the feet of his beloved, whereas he is but submitting them to the trampling of his own desire. Passion is never so dangerous as when it takes the form of

abnegation. This achieved, then indeed is Nature armed at all points and invincible.

Since I have been in hospital on this southern coast I have seen a great French actress in a scabrous play. She portrayed, she *was* the vicious *dépravée* for whom every fine-looking man is the *coup de foudre*, as our neighbours say, thunderbolt in plain English. She wore Babylonish head-gear and had the *allure* of a horse. Her wide and sensitive nostrils quivered with passion, and yet she had a way of looking sidelong down that queer nose of hers like the Madonnas of the early Italians. And, consummate artist that she is, she managed a note of self-pity among the unbridled luxury. To think, then, that this witty passion of Réjane, the strict fidelity of the ladies Gadgett and Runnell, the mutual devotion of the Steepleton pair and my ardent friendship for little Amy Dewhurst are all part of the same natural lure!

My first glimpse of Amy was of a woebegone little figure crying bitterly and rubbing its shins in the drawing-in room at Christopher Dewhurst's. I am not going to explain in detail what is meant by the complicated operation known as drawing-in. Sufficient to say that a drawer-in was an operative with some physical defect disabling him from harder work and who sat on a low stool and poked about with a hook through a screen of miniature bullrushes for the threads tendered to him by an unseen parcel of humanity seated on the other side. Strangers to a cotton mill might have asked why the children on their stools sat with their legs drawn up apprehensively beneath them. The answer was to be found in the sharp iron plates on the wooden clogs

of the drawer-in—the best of spurs for jaded little slaves.

The shed was a small one, rented by one Christopher Dewhurst, more familiarly known as “Kester” or “Kit,” who had begun life as a weaver, had risen to overlooker, and had finally managed to scrape together sufficient money to buy a few second-hand looms and to be of interest to my uncle. Reuben had decided that it was to him that I was to be first apprenticed. Kit had been financed by Ackroyd and Marston for some years, and the bleeding process was nearing its end. The little girl was Kester’s younger daughter.

I divined what was the child’s trouble and I put my arm round her. I was an instant victim to that phase of desire in which the very youthful wish that they could die for the object of their adoration.

And immediately the chance offered.

“Come back, ye little b——,” said a coarse voice, which I recognised as belonging to Joe Blackley, a burly savage slightly lame in one foot. He could carry a beam weighing twice his own weight the length of the shed and down to the loom and deposit it as lightly as a feather. His employer, who was also his uncle, was half afraid of him, and indeed he had an ugly reputation for violence.

“She’s not coming back,” I said, in a voice I tried to make steady. Joe Blackley emerged from behind his frame.

“What’s that yo say?”

“She’s not coming back,” I repeated.

The fellow laughed and spat a stream of brown tobacco juice. His shirt was open at the neck and I could see that he was, after his kind, magnificent.

His fist was enormous; his whole body despite the lameness the splendid animal.

“Now look yo here, my fine gentleman,” he began, “let’s unerstan’ one another. It’s noan yo as pays t’lass, and it’s noan t’lass’s feyther noather. It’s me. Yo pay me and ah belong to yo. That’s t’law o’ labour. Ah pay this wench and she belongs to me. That’s also t’law o’ labour. If yo dunno like it, get into Parliament and make some bloody law as yo dun like. But leave me and this lass alone till it is made, willta.”

“She’s not going to sit on that stool again,” I said as impressively as I could.

The fellow did not answer but spat again, deliberately. Then he put his great tattoo’d hand on her wrist and gave the delicate arm a turn which drove the blood from her face and all mine into my brain.

And I struek him. It sounds incredible, but I actually struck Joe Blackley. After which, and for apparently infinite time, I stood blinking and wondering what power there was to protect me from being ground to pulp. Joe put his hand to his mouth and seemed to wonder at the little smear of blood. I think it was the first time in his life that he had been hit. His was a slow-moving rage and I had time to be terribly frightened.

“Joe dear,” said the girl, and to this day I cannot make out what made her add that fine “dear” to her cry of entreaty.

The big fellow shot out a great arm and fist and Amy covered her face with her hands. And then I found myself unhurt.

“Ah think, mester,” said Joe, “as yo’re in t’ reet and ah’m in t’ wrong.”

His shooting out of his fist had been an offer to shake hands, and it occurred to me that he had never shaken hands before.

“Come on, lass,” he said, “ah willna hurt thee.”

And Amy went back to her place again and took up her work without so much as giving me a glance.

In spite of my terrible desire to see more of her I avoided the room as much as possible so as not to have the air of spying upon Joe. One afternoon in the following week as I was sitting on the long warehouse counter dangling my legs and chatting with the cloth-looker, who should appear at the crazy door but Joe. I saw at once what was amiss from the extraordinary look of compunction on his handsome, villainous face.

“Ah’ve punned t’ lass again,” he said, and then in reply to my gesture, “No, yo canna see her. Ah’ve sent her whoam. Ah’m reet sorry, but ah conna help it. It’s my feet thinks afore my yed. There’s nobbud one thing for it. Speak to Kester and get her into t’ shed. She’s old enough and ah shanna be able to punse her theer.”

That night I told Kester that it would be better for his daughter that she should go to work at the loom. I need hardly say that Amy had made no complaint to him and that I could not be disloyal to Joe.

“They all want to weyve afore they’ve strength,” said Kit, “but happen you’re reet, mester. I’s start her on Monday.”

And now began my first experience as a lover. I do not know that I contemplated any scope for my passion. I committed all the pretty follies. Amy was taken on as “tenter” on a pair of looms where, across the alley, I could catch the glint of her brown

hair and the flash of her dimpled arms. I would gaze at her by the hour together, and she would smile shyly, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. I avoided making her ridiculous by too much attention; I forbore to fetch her weft-tin or to carry the heavy pieces of woven cloth from loom to warehouse. Only I would arrange to be in the cloth-room when her "cuts" were brought in, and stand by her side while the cloth-looker, who was in the secret, scolded her for imaginary faults. And during the scolding, which would be elaborate and prolonged, Amy would blush prettily and pretend to listen. And I by her side had never the courage of a word. I remember the pattern of her two print dresses, one pink the other blue. I remember their texture and their clean, homely smell. I remember her beautiful little hands, delicate and flower-like, with the brown trade mark of oil from the loom on thumb and forefinger. My way of courting her was to make friends with her brother, also a weaver, with whom I would walk home, amazed to find how little store he set on his jewelled sister. I went so far as to join the Mutual Improvement Society, at which Bob Dewhurst was a shining light. I read papers on Vaccination—I think I must have been against that practice, as I managed to drag in a quotation from Shelley on Liberty—on Capital Punishment, on the Position of Women in the State, and, of course, on Tennyson. I managed to become really friendly with Kester, and would sit with him in his little front garden after tea whilst he smoked his pipe and talked about my uncle. But I saw surprisingly little of Amy. She was not more than a fragrance about the house.

Then one fine day, after many mysterious signs

and portents and with many circumlocutions, I was invited to supper.

I love that simplicity which translates good will into terms of tinned and blushing salmon, of fowls covered with a whitey-grey English sauce. I love the complicated ceremoniousness that goes to the carving of a lordly ham and that nice etiquette without which crumpets cannot properly be handed round. I like good-hearted people who press me to eat ten times more than mortal man has ever eaten. What in the circumstances can be nobler than bottled beer, and who may better adorn a table's head than the florid, buxom woman of forty-five who looks as though she had spent the afternoon inside her oven instead of before it? The good soul embraced me at every conceivable and inconceivable opportunity; whenever, for instance, she got up to change plates or to lay additional knives or to set entirely supererogatory crumpets before the fire. She had the motherliness of Mrs Crupp less the nankeen bosom, though she was not ill furnished in that particular. In fact I found myself wondering what chance there might be that so tender a little slip as Amy might grow up into so monstrous a blossom. But the woman pleased me enormously, as everything always has pleased me which is conceived on the generous scale. And in sincerity and hospitality Christopher Dewhurst's wife was bigger than life-size. There was also an elder daughter, one Leonora, a romantic personage of delicate health, who had found the mill too "common" and had drifted into hairdressing—the ladies' department. Her talk was so preponderantly of fronts and fringes and "transformations," or whatever they were called in that day, that during supper I boggled at

imaginary hairs in the sauce and for the rest of the evening felt a curious tickling sensation at the back of my throat.

Bob's nose was entirely in his plate.

"And is this all the family?" I asked, clumsily enough.

Mrs Dewhurst looked at her husband and put her hand to her bosom: "If tha hasna told him about our Alice, tha's no need to start on t' subject now. She's ill chosen, poor lass, but she's none the only lamb astray i' Manchester. I conna bide them folks as pretends to see their own in a coffin"—the Gadgets and the Dewhursts are sisters all the world over. "Happen she's noan waur off wheer she is than in one o' them ugly contraptions."

Kester opened his mouth and shut it again discreetly. His wife mopped one eye with the corner of her apron; it appeared to me that she held tears in reserve, an enormous flood of them I felt sure. Suddenly she asked me to give them a tune on a piece of furniture which, after the albums and the flower vases and the plush cover had been removed, discovered itself as a piano.

I soon found that Amy had a pretty, piping little voice and could struggle quite nicely through simple ditties of her own choosing. Her singing gave me the chance as I accompanied her of hanging upon her quavering little notes with all the tenderness of the ardent lover. Then Leonora sang with tragic fervour *As Friends we Met, as Friends we Part*, a sentimentality of the period. I can see her now in her dress of green cotton velvet and her air half Mrs Siddons, half some painter's Lady of Shallott. My contribution to the

evening's entertainment was the performance with immoderate brilliance of that even then outmoded piece of musical fireworks, the lamented Ascher's *Alice Where Art Thou?* Not, I think, a very tactful choice under the circumstances, but the best of pianists is limited to his *répertoire* and this happens to be the only piece I have ever been able to learn by heart.

But folk who get up at five in the morning have to go to bed betimes, so at an early hour I said good-bye. Amy put her hand into mine for a moment and I held it gentlier than a captive bird. Leonora flung out a magnificent arm; throughout the evening her gestures had been superb.

"As friends we met . . ." she said archly.

"As friends we part," I gallantly replied.

Brother Bob had gone to bed immediately after supper.

Mrs Dewhurst embraced me in a manner that I can only describe as voluminous. She then kissed her daughters, who pecked back in return.

"Oh, pa," exclaimed Leonora, as she chose for the bestowal of her chaste caress a spot on the parental crown, "oh, pa, your scalp is awful!"

This was the first of many similar evenings.

Dear, delightful people.

§ ii

All this part of my life is fused into the tiny presence and personality of Amy. In her is bound up the recollection of long summer days under the low glass roof when men and women sweated and swore and thirsted and discarded all but such clothes as would

decently cover them, and Amy alone remained cool. Even now the slanting rays of an August sun bring back an old day's accumulated odours, the rancid smell of loom oil, the sour stench of decomposing flour, the staleness of human sweat. Oh, that nostalgia and physical memory of the senses, bringing back the first instinctive sympathy with the factory hand and, by analogy, with all toilers! I remember my curious attitude on the first return home after contact with the mill hands—shame that I had descended to their level, contempt for those who held themselves above it. I was an earnest reader of Tennyson at that time and knew better than any critical big-wig how infinitely apposite to the emptying of a skip of bobbins is "the scream of a madden'd beach dragg'd down by the wave."

And, of course, my senses could not have escaped the unusual stir. I should like to say that even to-day I cannot hear the whir of machinery or the sudden crescendo of an opening door without a vision of a pretty childlike face. . . . But what insincere nonsense this would be! I have forgotten her and there is not an ache left in me. I am really putting down what in that remote time I would have sworn to be my feelings now. I suppose Amy must have been pretty. Looking backwards and with the aid of a cheap photograph, I see only a fringe, a loose mouth and a pleasant commonness.

It goes without saying that during all this period I learned nothing about spinning, nothing about weaving and nothing about machinery. I still fail to understand why, when a piston has once been ejected, it should take the trouble to turn the other

cheek as it were, and submit itself for re-expulsion. There are people who allege this sort of thing to be comprehensible; good luck to them, say I. Equally little did I gather of what my uncle called the "general trend of business." Reuben would insist upon long talks every Sunday evening, asking casually after Kester's relations with his bank manager, whether his accounts for yarn were paid regularly and a hundred other significant questions to which I confess I answered according to the spur and invention of the moment. Then Reuben suggested that I might do worse than make a chum of Wally Buckley.

"But he's always drunk," I objected.

"Drunk or sober, he's the son of his father," Reuben replied. And then he informed me that he considered me proficient in weaving and that I was shortly to go to Greenwood and Birtwistle's to learn overlooking, and then on to Longshaw's, where I was to study warping and "slashing."

"And mind you," he added, "it isn't the working folk as I want you to hob-nob with; it's the bosses. Capital's your friend, not Labour."

The change to Greenwood's was a real grief to me, but a grief assuaged by the thick tea I was by this time expected to make at Kester's every Friday night. I have often wondered as to the attitude towards me of these good people. I imagine that they were conscious of none and accepted me in simple friendliness. They felt, I believe, that they could trust me, and besides, Amy was now sixteen, an age in Lancashire at which a girl is expected to be able to look after herself. As for the two of us, we were children together, and the utmost of my ardour was the kissing of

her hand, which amazing feat I accomplished once, tremblingly.

It was about this time that Geoffrey was admitted to partnership in the firm, an event which caused singularly little stir in our small world. Reuben had long known his son to be a fool, whilst the underpaid and underfed clerks were indifferent. Geoffrey himself signalled his accession to dignity by whistling for two whole hours instead of the usual hour and three-quarters. I cannot record any change in his manner to me except, perhaps, a more persistent recommendation of the works of Sir John Lubbock. But the considerable knowledge of my cousin to which I had now attained had led me to formulate a principle unknown to mathematicians and which goes by the high-sounding name of the Non-increasability of Nothing. More simply, add something to nothing and nothing remains. Geoffrey was the nuldest creature imaginable; no dignity exists which could have increased him. I do not know why he should figure so persistently in this history; perhaps it is because I cannot rid myself of the old spleen of having been chained to him for the greater part of my youth. I imagine that the wretch who has known fetters for twenty years can never quite forget them.

And then I ran across an old friend and made acquaintance with a new one who was to show me that neither the Bridge nor Ashton-under-Lyne was the centre of the universe, nor yet Manchester its hub. I do not believe that there was, with the exception of Westrom and my new friend, Claud Rodd, a single human being drawing breath at Crawley Bridge capable of grasping that beyond Manchester there is London,

and beyond London Paris, and that even Paris is not the end of the world. And I suppose that when ultimately I turned my back upon Manchester it was largely because of that city's astonishing conviction that there is no other place better worth living in, one conglomeration of citizenly bricks very much like another. Only they who have trudged the streets of the Bridge on wet Saturday nights, or patrolled, Sundays, the desolation of the Oxford Road, only those driven by sheer desperation of ennui to debauch without charm, only those who have suffered from a Manchester at rest can realise that spirit which has made England what she is. It is many years since I was in my native city; reports as recent as the year before the war relate that her greybeards still held classical concerts on Sunday evenings to be subversive of morality. Eloquence and to spare as to classical music destructive of the sanctity of the home. . . . It would seem that still, even as in my time, must city fathers mow and gibber. Cocasse! Cocasse!

I ran across Westrom in the back room of the little confectioner's shop where the élite of the Bridge took lunch. Entering by the side door to avoid congestion in the front of the shop, one squeezed past whoever happened to be washing his hands at a little tap and font cut in the right wall of the passage and lifted the latch of the door on the left. You followed the old established custom of bowing to the dozen pairs of jaws fulfilling their destiny and hard at it. You said "Good-morning, gentlemen," and followed up that salutation with an expression of opinion as to whether the rain would hold off or continue. Oh, the cheerfulness of the commercial traveller! I have

never been able to make out whether it is super-
valiance or mere anæsthesia. Certain I am that no
depression in trade, no loss of wife, no new disgrace of
prodigal son or wanton daughter could have occasioned
a diminution in the gallantry of little Briggs, whose
line was ladies' ware.

"No need to ask how you do, Mrs Bowkett"—Mrs
Bowkett, *née* Ramsden, was the proprietress. "Pork
to-day, is it? *And* cabbage? And do I spy apple
sauce? 'Pon my soul, ma'am, if there weren't no
Bowkett and there weren't no Mrs Briggs, there's no
saying what might happen."

Custom was not supposed to stale this sally, at which
the table roared for such time as I remained at the
Bridge. Then whom one day should I find seated
in the midst of these little people, gravely courteous
and even affable, but Westrom, whose fag I had been
at school. He had been appointed manager of the
Crawley Bridge branch of the great banking concern
known as the Kinder Bank, and was now a grown man
with what it is proper to call immense responsibilities.
These, he explained to me, consisted in transacting
business on lines laid down by directors in their dotage,
with never the swerve of a hair's-breadth in the
direction of progress or common-sense permitted until
such had been duly approved by higher authority.
It is in my mind that bigger institutions than the
Kinder Bank have been run on similar lines. Was the
ration of coal for the manager's office exceeded by a
single scuttle, then must Derby be placated. Did a
gale of wind blow the roof off the bank, then must Derby
be consulted before tacking it on again. "They chose
me," said Westrom, "out of eight hundred candidates

on the recommendation of a bishop, and then they treat me like a pickpocket descended from a line of gaol-birds. Upon my head they place a fruitless crown and put a barren sceptre in my gripe. I forget how many millions a year pass through my hands; I know that I may not spend tuppence-ha'penny off my own bat." He was, he told me, the youngest branch manager in the bank, a position to which he had attained through a talent for suffering his chiefs gladly. And then I found out that he was married—astonishing thing to have happened to a man with whom one has been at school.

"Come and have tea with my wife," he said. "You'll meet a queer chap called Rodd. A capital fellow."

Claud Rodd was one of the personalities of the Bridge. There was something Mephistophelian about the cadaverous figure to be seen from nine in the morning until nine at night on the other side of the plate-glass window of the little music shop situated in that part of the town known as Shufflebottom's Cross. His long, lean nose would be buried and his whole being engrossed for hours together in green, paper-backed volumes from which he would rouse himself to attend to customers with a gesture very like that of despair. He would offer you your roll of music with the tip of his shrinking finger and disdain to pick up your money until you had left the shop. It was rare that he gave you more than one-eighth of his attention. For thirty shillings a week he dispensed E strings, resin, seventeen-and-sixpenny fiddles, mouth-organs, *Methods by Easy Stages*, *Songs Without Words* (Mendelssohn) and English songs, alas! with words. The shop was also a circulating library, whose customers took what Fate in the

person of out-at-elbows Mr Rodd chose to give them.

"Trickett's have such nice, *suitable* books ; you can't go wrong," was the verdict of Mrs Twinney, the Vicar's wife, imposing upon the Bridge in the same way that Horatia Gadgett imposed upon our home parish.

"How do you manage to fit them all so exactly ?" I asked Rodd some time after I got to know him.

"Same as boots," he replied. "You measure 'em. Some of the poorer class need a bit of handling, say a diagnosis ; it matters to them what they read. But the rich, churchy people are all alike. They think they believe in the Bible ; I know they believe in the Parish Magazine. Rum thing, provincial taste. It's the one stable thing in an unstable universe. Or let's say stationary. I don't believe it can deteriorate, and I know it doesn't improve."

My first encounter with Claud, after the common-places over Mrs Westrom's tea-cups, had not opened too auspiciously. I had gone into the shop casually and asked if they had anything to read.

"We've books," said Rodd, looking savagely at me across the counter and with his head lowered as though for a charge. "Printed matter. Words, sentences, chapters. Leaves and a binding."

And he waved a threatening arm.

"Can you let me have a look at one of those little green volumes you're always buried in ?" I hazarded nervously.

"That depends. Can you read French ?"

"I can get along."

He put down the paper-back he had in his hand and looked me up and down slowly and deliberately.

“I can't let you have a look, as you put it. These little green chaps are my Bible. I mean they are to me what the Bible is to the priest, and probably a great deal more. They are my Balzac. And you want to have what you call a look at them. Well, you can't. I suppose you've been turning over the *Droll Stories* at the tobacconist's. I can see you've been prying through his window. Why, man, your nose is still flat from the pane.”

I was considerably startled.

“That's the worst of the hypocritical English. You are afraid of great writers until you come across some little bit which is supposed to be filthy, and then you hug that little bit of so-called filth and revel over it in secret. You don't know what a big man is. Do you suppose I could breathe the air of this stuffy little shop and stuffy little town and mix with your smug, stuffy little people if I hadn't something here?” And he hit the book a tremendous blow. “There are forty-odd volumes, nearly fifty, and I've read twenty-three. When I've finished the lot I'm off.”

“Where to?” I asked, moved by such a whirlwind of sincerity. Nobody at the Bridge in those days was ever known to show sign of emotion except in connection with beer and football.

“London or hell, anywhere out of this.” He waved an arm to include the shop, me, Mrs Trickett, Shufflebottom's Cross, Crawley Bridge.

“I'm not really insane,” he went on, “but I've no one to talk to, and sometimes I think I must talk or go mad. But if you really do want to read Balzac and to read him seriously I could put you up to him. Let me see now. You *could* begin with *Eugénie*

Grandet, but he wrote it for his nieces, and that's a drawback. And then there's *La Cousine Bette*. Hulot's fine, and if you can relish him you've got the proper stomach. But, really, I think you couldn't do better than *Le Père Goriot*. 'Madame Vauquer, née de Conflans . . .' What's her maiden name to do with it? you may say. Well, if you can't get hold of the significance of that, Balzac is not for you."

I said humbly that I would do my best to struggle with the mysterious significance.

"Very well, then," he said. "Now I'll put you to the test. Do you know the Twinney woman?"

"The Vicar's wife? Yes," I answered.

"Call on her?"

"When I have to."

"Then take this book. It's the first volume of *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*. I suppose you know what that means."

I nodded.

"Next time you call, leave it on her drawing-room table. Then write and ask her whether you did not leave a book by mistake. Put the title in full and write it big, so that she can't pretend it's a translation of *Adam Bede*. If you are up to this, you are a Balzacian."

I demurred a little.

"Oh, I'm not bothering about the good taste of it. I want to know what *you* are worth. Call it an initiation if you like."

I left the shop under engagement and with the first volume of *Splendeurs* in my hand.

Ten days later I walked into Trickett's and with a

superb gesture flung on the counter the outraged Twinney's reply. It ran :

“Mrs Twinney regrets that Mr Marston should have left in her house, and where the Vicar might have seen it, the book alluded to. Mrs Twinney will not give Mr Marston the trouble of calling in person as she is sending the volume, under cover, by her maid.”

And that evening found me absorbed in the furniture and inmates of a French boarding-house kept by a certain Madame Vauquer, *née de Conflans*.

§ iii

The last days of 1893 were marked by the great Crawley Bridge Pit Disaster. I have no wish to sadden these pages with a highly-wrought account of the catastrophe and computations of the numbers of maimed and killed. Numbers by themselves mean little. In one of our recent excursions from hospital—we take the air, you know—I discovered in a tiny Roman Catholic church a form of intercession for the one hundred and forty thousand souls who must each day pass into another state. Is this the world's death-rate or the mortality amongst the faithful? Are the millions of India and China included? One hundred and forty thousand death-beds! The thing is unthinkable; consider the stir of a single woe.

The disaster at the Crawley Bridge pit found me an interested and absorbed spectator. The scene was classical in its fidelity to tradition—the beshawled and ill-kempt rush to the pit-head, the flare of lights

in the darkness, the fussiness of officials, the agonising waits, the rumours and counter-rumours, the haphazard heroism, the frantic joy, the huddled woe. I went through it as a spectator, hardly conscious of that dread aspect of the affair in which one hundred and forty souls were hurled into eternity with, as the phrase goes, oaths and jests on their lips. The menaces is idle. No man were the worse for dying in laughter and ribaldry who has so lived. Man is to be judged by his fashion on a lusty day when health and nerve are good and death is a long way off. . . . I remember later the huge common grave, the plain white coffins hastily tacked together. And most extraordinary of all, a recollection of Rodd in the funeral crowd, weeping and half distraught.

“My poor brave lads,” was all he could say, “my poor brave lads.”

Westrom was there looking stern and ill at ease, in a group with the colliery proprietors among whom I noted old Absalom Buckley and his son Wally, frightened to soberness. Among the miners killed was a humble youth who had been disdainfully rejected by Amy's sister, the proud and mannered Leonora. In life the pretensions of the lad had been ignored; in death they gave importance to Leonora's family. With a natural desire to be as much to the fore in the event as anybody else, the Dewhursts gave out that Nat had never, after all, been forbidden to hope, and that there was no knowing but that Leonora might not ultimately have condescended. The family was therefore apt for much visiting and condoling, and stout, perspiring Mrs Kester sat for three days in the front parlour assuring visitors that Leonora was “that

upset " that since the tragedy she had neither bitten nor supped. In reality Leonara was busy upstairs composing a costume in which on the day of the funeral she should come near to compassing the Tragic Muse.

The disaster was the occasion for one of my uncle's epistolary flights. I had suggested, in that impulsive way so little pleasing to men of business, that it would be a graceful thing for the firm as a firm to send a subscription to the fund in aid of the bereaved families. I had begged to be allowed to contribute out of my capital an amount equal to Geoffrey's share in any such contribution. Here is my uncle's reply—concise and damnable.

OAKWOOD,

29th December 1893.

MY DEAR NEPHEW,—I have your letter in which you suggest that the firm as a firm should subscribe to the Crawley Bridge Colliery Explosion Relief Fund. I cannot agree to this. Ackroyd and Marston is a business firm having partners of different ages, connections and ideals, who can neither legally nor practically dispose of any of the firm's money except for the prosecution of the business of the firm. It would not be fair to my junior partner or partners that I should give subscriptions in the name of the firm, a portion of which they would be obliged to contribute, and I certainly object to their giving donations a major portion of which will come out of my pocket. My personal subscription list amounts to over £500 a year, but I have no reason to believe that any of the objects of my charity would arouse the sympathy of my

junior partner or partners. I have, through what is now a long life, learnt that money dispensed through certain charitable agencies is well disposed. But my partner or partners have not had the same experience and might reasonably object were I to give in the name of the firm and at their expense. I claim for myself the same freedom which I am willing to accord to them.

I cannot see the application of your principle that "great national calamities should be a charge on the State." What is a "national calamity" and by what are we to distinguish it from a local one? Does this depend upon the area affected or the number of lives imperilled? Nor do I see how subscription by firms "approaches an ideal of alleviation by the State which might sow the seeds of national insurance." Any scheme of national insurance must involve contribution by every member of the community, including the recipient of the benefaction. Contribution by firms would simply mean voluntary donation by a small portion of the community. I am myself no Socialist. I regard the exercise of voluntary charity as an important part of the discipline of life, and I can never agree to divest myself of the responsibility of dealing with the means which God has granted me according to the conscience which He has put into me.

I alone am responsible that the amount of capital standing to your credit in the books of the firm shall remain intact until you attain to twenty-five years of age. I cannot listen to the suggestion that you should be allowed to fritter away any portion of it.

Wishing you all seasonable things, I am, your affectionate uncle,

REUBEN ACKROYD.

It is only fair to add that in the list of subscriptions a sum of one hundred pounds figured against my uncle's name.

And then Amy fell ill.

The doctor bade us be of good cheer and not too hopeful. She lay in her darkened room day in and day out, week after week, her beautiful hair cut short, her little face wasted and drawn, her hands once so cool and flower-like now hot and fretful. Every afternoon I would steal away from the mill and spend half-an-hour at her bedside, returning at night to watch Kester smoke his anxious pipe by the corner of the fire. The two women were splendid. I had expected an ecstasy of fuss from the mother, purposeless rushings up and down stairs and futile scurryings to and fro. I had looked for a whole gallery of tragic airs from Leonora. I was certainly not prepared for the fortitude and quiet confidence which they exhibited and inspired. The whole house was heavy with creosote, of which the scent to-day brings back Amy more clearly than any amount of careful retrospection. One afternoon I brought her one of those new-fangled trinkets then springing into vogue—a watch hanging from a lover's knot in metal. The bow was worn on the breast, and save for the fact that the wearer whilst advertising the time to all the world was unable to catch a glimpse of it herself, the device was ideal. As I bent over the child to fasten the watch on her little gown she put her arms round my neck and whispered : “ I'm not going to die, Mr Ned, am I ? ”

“ Of course not, Amy,” I answered. “ How can you

think of it, with all of us making poultices and shaking medicine bottles and buying beautiful watches."

"Very well then, I won't," she said brightly; "that settles it."

By the first warm, sunny days of May I was able to take her as far as the prim park with the rustie benches, old Buckley's gift to Crawley Bridge. There we would sit facing that gentleman's image in white marble with whiskers like grace-notes. There we would sit in the sun and listen to the barrel organ grinding out :

Oh ! Lizer ! Sweet Lizer !
If yer die an old maid you'll 'ave only yerself to blame !
D'y 'ear Lizer ? *Dear* Lizer !
'Ow d'yer fancy 'Awkins for yer other name ?

And then would come the crooning body of the song, and I would murmur in Amy's ear :

She wears an artful bonnet,
Feathers stuck upon it,
Coverin' a fringe all curled ;
She's just about the sweetest,
Prettiest and neatest
Doner in the wide, wide world.

And I suppose that is as far as ever I got towards love-making. Our relations were undefined and I was glad to have them so. "You'll never marry my lass," said Kester, "but I can trust you, Mr Ned, noan from here to the park but to the end of the world if need be."

And then Amy had a relapse. She caught a chill through prolonging a golden afternoon till the shadow of old Buckley grew positively alarming. This time

Death was in an angrier mood and came near to getting the better of devotion. And I to losing my reason. It is a humiliating thing to reflect that a few short years should completely efface a passion of which the keynote has been eternity. In my trouble I sought the confidence of Monica, who was holidaying in the Lake District with her brother. This is what she wrote :

MY DEAREST NEDDIE,—So you have found her, and I am not going to say any of the things you are expecting me to say. You are certainly in the mood to hate anybody who would dissuade you from doing a noble thing. I do not gather exactly what noble thing it is that you contemplate, but I am sure that you will be fine and generous. All that I can make out from your letter is that the little lady is “possessed of great beautie,” that she is ill and that you are afraid of losing her. Let me say at once that she will recover, which is all the more reason why I should add her name, which you have not told me, to my little list of people to be prayed for.

At heart you are a very nice boy, though like everybody who wants to be an artist it is in the nature of things that you must be intensely selfish. But I don't see why, in time and with practice, you should not get to care for this little lady better than for yourself. At present what you are in love with is the image of her which you make to yourself for your devotion. Now this is really indulging in the extremest form of selfishness, but it is a form so beautiful that it deceives even Shakespeare's lovers. I believe you can make the innocent little thing happy. You write of a “sacred

trust," which is a very pretty phrase, but you will have to take care that the sacred trust does not degenerate into a burden. And then you use the word "cherubim." Here I can't follow you. All I know about these little people is that like the seraphim they "continually do cry."

For goodness sake don't let's have any nonsense about educating her. Can't you see that she is educating you? Whilst you are ransacking your great brain for some abstruse reference the poor child is probably expressing some simple thought which has just occurred to her, and by putting it naturally is also putting it beautifully. Don't worry about the social status. We shall, of course, want to see a lot of her, and I will take mother by the hand and point out the charming little ideas the child's mind is stored with.

I hope this will not be just a mood, Ned. Remember that your coming into her life means more to her than her coming into yours means to you. Men are like railway trains. They journey through miles of squalid towns and noisy, smoky tunnels—these are their business affairs—and emerge for a moment into the sunlight, with glimpses of ragged blue, a village among trees, thatched roofs, roses and golden-haired children—these are their love affairs. And then they plunge once more among factory chimneys and gloom and dirt, emerging once again into the sunlight. But this time it is the sunlight of a different valley. The journey is gay for them, but the villages feel being left behind. Remember that when you leave your love the room grows cold and lonely. This is really nonsense. The room has its chairs and tables; it is she who is lonely.

Don't think me flippant. I will do all I can to help you and more, only you mustn't ask me to take you too seriously. You yourself are fond of preaching that there are a thousand ways of taking life and only one wrong way, and that the serious one. I simply can't be serious on a fine day in Borrowdale. The Lakes always make me feel that a star danced for me as well as for Beatrice. I have been out on Cat Bells all the afternoon with Geoffrey and a Shakespeare. Geoffrey had his ferrets and I spent the afternoon dangling a dead rabbit outside a hole that one of the nasty things had got lost in. So I whiled away the time with *Measure for Measure* till I got bored with Isabella, and then read bits of *Much Ado*. Hence the elegance of these presents.

I have no news except that Dorothy Greenhill, whom you have never met, is to be married on Thursday next to someone you have never seen, in a coat and skirt and other trivialities.

All sunshine, comfort and peace to you, and a kiss to be bestowed as you shall think fit.

MONICA.

My thoughts on reading this were that of all possible cousins Monica was the toppingest. I forget what word it was that I must have used. It is all so long ago, but "toppingest" gives the sense of it.

One day about this time Westrom suggested a glass of port after lunch—unusual debauch for him—and said he supposed they could get on without him at the bank for an odd half-hour or so. I saw that he wanted to talk. We held our glasses of sixpenny up to the light

and appraised the colour and bouquet of the syrupy stuff. Then, when the other customers had departed: "Tell me about it," he commanded, as though I had still been his fag.

So I told him.

"Can you do it?" he asked. "To be quite candid, I don't know whether you've the grit."

I sketched a protest which he waved aside.

"Oh, I know you've a year or two's store of fine impulse. Now you are thoroughly and terribly in earnest. Now you are transfigured and translated and you mean it beautifully, every bit. But it is a very big venture. Remember that you don't fall alone. You can't come down from idealising to a mean performance without hurting the little thing."

"But I'm not going to hurt her," I interrupted.

"My dear chap, of course you are not going to hurt her now. But the beginning is easy; all plunges, all exaltations are easy. We won't talk of failure; the middling success would be bad enough. I've not much liking for compromise. Have you fellowship to fall back upon?"

I thought we had.

"For, you know, to abandon fellowship because the edge is off the romance is altogether unforgivable, and the edge is off before you know where you are. It isn't any good fretting and calling the universe to witness that you've done nothing to deserve it. It's the price, you know."

We were both silent for a few moments. Even then I had an inkling that I was only playing with Amy. One may play at love and do harm, and yet without bad intent. I am glad to think that I did no harm.

“Then it puts a definite end to razzling,” Mark went on. “That you may taste satiety doesn’t mean that you are at liberty to go on tasting it in different directions. You’ve chosen your life partner and must stick to her. Now can you? I don’t want to be discouraging, but there’s her education and upbringing and traditions to think of. Will she suffice you, say in ten years? Will your superiority content her? It’s a fine thing you are attempting, and you alone know whether you can carry it through. You can try to deceive yourself or you can be honest with yourself. If you have any doubt at all, better be humble and turn back. Who is it talks about ‘the habit of middling actions which men call common-sense’? Of course there’s risk in any great adventure, but remember that responsibility doesn’t end with failure. Forgive me.”

I remained silent.

“You’ll find it tremendously jolly and exciting in the beginning,” he went on more lightly. “I’ve been through it. You’ll have carpets and fire-irons to choose; it’s no end of a lark, I can tell you.”

The matter-of-fact “fire-irons” fell on my consciousness like a knell. I knew then that marriage was not within the zone of the possibilities, that I had never contemplated it.

I had little sleep that night and for many nights. In addition to the worry of Amy’s illness I began to have doubts about the fairness of my lack of serious intention and the ugliest certainty as to my uncle’s dispositions in the matter of her father. The child was once more out of danger when, one evening, Kester unburdened himself to me. I will condense. The story was that

a year or two previously he had borrowed a couple of thousand pounds from Aekroyd and Marston under agreement to sell all his cloth through them. That the instalments by which he was to repay were considerably in arrear, that the prices offered and enforced by my uncle had for a long time been little short of disastrous, and that his spinners had declined to furnish him with more yarn or the bank with any further facilities. On the previous Friday he had had the greatest difficulty in getting the money together to pay his workpeople, whilst he foresaw that on the Friday to come it would be absolutely impossible for him to pay out. Black ruin staring him in the face, he had gone down to Manchester to see my uncle.

Kester sat gazing into the fire and I thought of all the stories I had ever read of fallen greatness. However small the height, the fall and the tragedy are there.

I gathered that he had been received with infinite affability. Reuben had made him a proposal which was neither more nor less than that he should take over all Kester's looms and plant and stocks of cotton and cloth on the one hand and his debts on the other. There was also an offer to install him as manager at what was to become Aekroyd and Marston's new mill, at a salary of fifty shillings a week with, for his family's sake, a sum of three hundred pounds down. My uncle had given him two days in which to accept, and Kester's arms were already pleach'd, his neck cor-rigible, his head bowed. Kit had never been a fighter. There was little in the scene to record, no grand disillusion, no wild-ey'd despair, no clutching at the

breast, no broken enunciation of the petition for bread.

A simple silence, Kester gazing at the fire.

And then his wife, who during the recital had sat by her husband's elbow, her mouth pursed, her whole being taut, put her hand on his shoulder.

"Thou wert allus a fool, Kit, a big soft-hearted fool, but we shanna starve. Doan't thee take it to heart, lad. I've worked before and I'se work again. We're sure of three hundred pound and the children can fend for themselves, thank God! What does it matter whether we've fifty shillings a week or five hundred so long as my man can sleep?" And she patted him.

Kester showed no signs of rising to the eloquence of the broken bankrupt; or perhaps it was that his recital had exhausted him. He exhibited a singular detachment.

"I was born a working man and I'se die one," he said. "There's worse," he added after a pause.

As may be imagined, I was feeling extremely uncomfortable. How much of an unele's treachery may not run in one's own blood?

"I'll talk to Mr Reuben," I said, though I must confess with but a poor stomach behind the words.

"You'll waste your breath, I'm thinking, Mr Ned. He's a hard, crooked man and I took him for straight."

And never again did I hear either of the honest pair open their lips on the subject of the rich Manchester merchant who had betrayed them.

I was as good as my word and went down to Manchester next day with the express purpose of persuading my unele to modify the harshness of his terms. But my tackling of Reuben was about as

effective as an attempt by a Parliamentary novice to man-handle Mr Gladstone. Now that I come to think of it, my presentation of Kester's case consisted largely in a charge against Reuben of lying, treachery and commercial dishonesty. My uncle heard me out with perfect patience, then lit a cigar, and leaning back in his chair launched forth into what sounded like a public address :

“ I am afraid, my dear nephew,” he began, “ that you do not quite grasp the principles involved in those two great factors of commercial life, supply and demand, and which necessarily underlie the business of buying and selling. I have for several years undertaken to provide Christopher Dewhurst with an uninterrupted succession of orders at prices which should be approved by him and which I am therefore bound to presume to be acceptable to him. This although I may not have had a single yard of orders for his cloth on my books. The obligation justified me in placing my orders at the time I judged most suitable and at the lowest prices which I could persuade him to accept. I stood to be shot at. I might have lost ; I may have gained. You seem to forget that I am in business, that I and my partner ”— here he looked at Geoffrey—“ are in business with the primary object of making money and not of preventing your friends from losing it.”

“ Edward seems to think ‘ Successors to Don Quixote and Company ’ should be our style,” put in Geoffrey, with an insane giggle.

“ I think, too,” continued my uncle, “ that you are blinded by, shall I say, an irrelevant interest. And now that this little matter has been touched upon, may

I ask what are your intentions with regard to Miss Amy ? ”

I was considerably taken aback. Nevertheless I answered boldly :

“ I’m very fond of her.”

“ So, probably, is her father. So, too, should I probably be, were I honoured with her acquaintance. But I am not content with the general statement. My duty as your guardian demands that I should ask you whether this young woman is your mistress.”

“ Certainly not,” I replied, unable on the spur of the moment to find more burning words of refutation. I was horribly ashamed, not for myself but for Reuben.

“ Are you engaged to marry her ? ”

“ Not yet.”

“ Is it your intention to marry her ? ”

I did not answer.

“ Marriage, though foolish, I can understand, and an illicit relation I can conceive. But I will not have any shilly-shallying. The day you lead this young woman into harlotry ”—Reuben’s anger was of the patriarchal turn—“ sees the end of your connection with Ackroyd’s. Do you understand, boy ? ”

I remained mute.

“ And let me have no further nonsense either about my business or your women. Dewhurst will accept my terms ; he licks my hand already. I have given him three hundred pounds to cover his decency ; otherwise he hasn’t a rag. Anybody else would have stripped him to the bone. I give you until to morrow morning to decide between Dewhurst and me, between his family and mine, and I give you fair warning that if

you decide for Dewhurst you and he and his brat may go to the devil together."

I prefer not to linger. Three summers later Amy married a young traveller in healds and reeds who had once been wont to kick little girls on the shins. Life is like that. For some years Christmas time brought with it the best wishes of Mr and Mrs Joe Blackley. And then the cards ceased and I do not in the least know what has become of my old friends. I heard in a roundabout way that the brother went to Australia and that Leonora drifted to the stage. The parents have long been dead.

CHAPTER IV

§ i

ENGLAND in the middle nineties !

I have often been struck with the immunity from time and environment with which novelists endow their characters. I do not mean that Dickens failed to convey Mr Pickwick about in stage-coaches and Miss Bolo in sedan-chairs, or that Mr Wells is not very proud of his latest aeroplane. These are the exceptions. Your average novelist will record the minutest development in his hero's sentimental dispositions and none at all in the growth of the world about him. Life is short, but its grasp is immense, and there are surely other phenomena to mark a man's passage besides the number of his intrigues and the fluctuations of his bank balance. I hold myself to be a youngish man still, and yet can recall the time when electric light, the telephone and the postal order were not. I remember the childish opposition which these new-fangled notions encountered on the part of the gas companies, the Postmaster-General and the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. The gas companies saw their light extinguished for ever by their more brilliant and convenient sister. The Postmaster-General saw in the telephone a dangerous competitor to his beloved telegraph system. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce saw in the increased facilities for payment by post a diminution in the profits of the cheque bank. There does not seem to have existed at this date, even in the minds of the most intelligent, the shadow of an

idea of communal interest. Jealousy of the improving printing press, animosity of the hand-loom weaver towards his more mechanical brother, hostility of the Church towards Science, that lady's jealousy of Philosophy, all make up a catalogue to prove that the dearest enmity of man is reserved for him who seeks to make two grains of knowledge sprout in the time of one. The novelist who should endow his hero with the base attitude of increasing resentment would but copy life, instead of which he is content to represent him as untouched by the march of events. I hesitate to believe that the fashion of a man's mind changes less than the cut of his clothes.

Where were we then in '94 ?

The year 1894 was woefully, though as a commencing foggy I am inclined to think fascinatingly, behind the times. The Poles, North and South, had still a few lustres of virginity before them and the Regalia of St Patrick at Dublin Castle thirteen more years of non-molestation. Civilisation had four years to wait for the Jameson raid ; Omdurman was not yet ; and the Mahdi's head had not become a bee in childish bonnets. The world was not clamouring for its news at a halfpenny ; it had not occurred to private citizens to parade the streets shrieking that they wanted eight and wouldn't wait ; it was feasible to grow sweet peas in a non-competitive spirit and to eat in quietude the bread of one's fancy. It was possible to enter a music hall at half-past eight and not be ejected at nine ; famous French actresses had not contemplated appearance between performing fowl and smirking, scented contortionists. Music halls had not arrived at the ridiculous pretence of providing shows

for the young miss and moralists did not go about asking whether if writers had been better men they would have written better books. The country-side smelt of hawthorn and of honeysuckle, and the stink of petrol was held an abomination. The handling of reins could still be counted among the pleasures of life, and for two luxurious years the speed of motor cars was to be regulated by a man carrying a flag. The race-horse Ladas had won the Derby for the Prince of Wales, and a foal was now being dropped to prove the existence of the type of human to whom that which is permissible in an heir apparent is deplorable in a Prime Minister. W. G. Grace had not more than a paltry eighty or ninety centuries to his credit, the Indian prince had not taken up his studies at Cambridge, and the professional batsman after achieving his two or three hundred runs still slunk off the field by a humbler exit than that which received the contribution-less amateur. The jolly and tuneful *Geisha*, *The Belle of New York*, *Florodora* and *San Toy* were as yet unborn. So too were *Trilby* and *Mr Pig-Pig!* whilst the womb of time still held in reserve faith in Mr Bernard Shaw's plays as a commercial speculation.

The years immediately preceding '94 had seen the Maybrick trial and the Baccarat scandal, the death of Tennyson and General Booth's contention that darkest England was altogether gloomier and dingier than darkest Africa.

The year itself saw Mr Gladstone in power and drawing distinctions so subtle that no one else could perceive them, which is perhaps not quite the same thing as saying one thing and meaning another. To the fact

of his premiership I attach little importance, so long have I been accustomed to hold it immaterial whether we be governed by any particular set of party politicians or by the elephant Jumbo. The famous Death Duties and the Two Power Standard were under discussion and the country was still basking in the sun or languishing in the night of Free Trade. Whichever view be held, there is no doubt that the country was in for an era of unexampled prosperity. Queen Victoria and Lord Randolph Churchill were waning forces ; Robert Louis Stevenson was dying. The cotton trade had just arrived at the famous Brooklands agreement, that agreement which provides that changes of rate of wages to cotton operatives should not take place oftener than once a year, and that no single change should exceed five per cent. of the wage. It goes without saying that this simple and immoral treaty has been of more value to the cotton employer than all the law-mongering since the time of Noah. Mr Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls* and Mr Ian Maclaren's *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* had left the country not even its eyes to weep with, and Miss Marie Corelli was at the height of her fame. Henry Irving was busy proving that greatness in the actor may make the tawdriest material acceptable ; Ellen Terry throwing herself away as ever upon clowning Nance Oldfields when all the world was on fire for Beatrice, Viola, Imogen. But not even that dateless and imperishable beauty which was hers gives the particular note of '94. That note was struck by the æsthetes then at the height of their delightful folly. The world was one yellow pageant or peril, as you will—I am not a policeman. Yellow asters

vied with green carnations ; Dodo, Paula Tanqueray and Esther Waters jostled each other for the greatest shares of attention. There were amusing contrasts between new and old schools. At one theatre could be heard the old-fashioned "Last time, Clemmy my boy," of Mr Edward Terry ; over the way Mrs Patrick Campbell would be demonstrating how evenings at country houses inevitably lead to suicide. In the provinces a sporting actress on being asked what she hoped to find among the villain's papers could be heard to reply : "The winner of the Manchester Cup." And the Manchester gallery to applaud with hands and feet. On the lighter stage little ladies with knickers artlessly turned up babbled of Alabama coons. In purely masculine circles golf had not yet become popular, and the middle-aged *roué* sought amusement in flirting between the sets of a game of pat-ball filched from royal tennis. In more serious matters Herbert Spencer was nearing the last pages of his *Synthetic Philosophy*, and the young bloods complained that the champagne of '84 was still a trifle new.

§ ii

But it must not be imagined that the slow-going, purposeful provincial reacts to his time in the same degree as his sparrow-like, metropolitan brother. I take Wally Buckley as the type of coming-on industrial. Old Absalom may have known little about the elegancies of life, but at least he was frank, sturdy and staunch. His son inherited none of his father's quality. To while away such time as he had

to wait for his inheritance, he "followed" drink. The phrase, in the mouths of its Crawley Bridge users, does not amount to a reproach; it is a simple statement of fact, as who should say a taste for whippets. That I consider Wally as typical of much of the youth of Lancashire of my day is not a reproach except in the sense that a plain statement may be a reproach.

Absurd then to attempt to describe the Lancashire year in terms of the Yellow Book and Beardsley, Paula Tanqueray and Wilde. In Manchester itself there was a skin-deep pretence of moving with the times. Oh, but reluctantly and with what infinities of protest. The Limpkin's attitude to Paula may be taken as typical. "Unnecessary" was her adjective for the play, but then I've heard her use that word to describe the kiss of Judas. Many a tea-table did one set by the cars in objecting that the lover's old relations with Paula constitute no bar to marriage with her step-daughter, except within the walls of a theatre. An advance in Victorian play-writing certainly, in the sense that a change from nakedness to woad is an advance. But it were fantastic to use the theatre as a measure of progress in Crawley Bridge. One gauge there was, and one only. Trams! In '94 the miserable single horse had already given place to the more dashing and encouraging pair, which, it was even beginning to be seen, might with equal convenience be attached to either end of the tram and so save the holding up of the traffic necessitated by the turning round of the whole encumbrance. The directorate of the private company to which the vehicles belonged appeared to spend most of its time in devising

means for detecting dishonesty in its employees—they had the prettiest collection imaginable of man- and booby-traps, bags, boxes, tickets punchable in the presence of the passenger, perforable to the tinkle of little bells—whereas on any question of improved comfort they were adamant. Street-lighting remaining constant, the passing of time was unrecorded at Crawley save in the matter of its traction.

Morality was in those days and in that tiny corner of the world an amazing, rigid jumble. It consisted, if you belonged to the upper classes, in not riding on the tops of the said trams, in not smoking pipes in the street, in not playing games on Sundays, in not frequenting race-meetings, in having no intercourse with the lower orders. It consisted, if you belonged to these lower, in having nothing to do on Sunday evenings, in going nowhere, in hanging about the streets dejectedly spitting. In foulness. To people of my uncle's class it consisted in knowing who were the other really nice people, in recognising the proper class to travel by and the right seats to occupy at the theatre. Reuben held that sellers of cloth should leave to buyers the first-class railway carriage and the more expensive stalls, contenting themselves also with the return rather than the inauguration of salutes. To travel in any conveyance which was not closed and on four wheels was improper, to take in a London newspaper an aberration amounting to a vice. Morality at Crawley Bridge—and I have noticed the same thing in other parts of the world—was a matter of what you might not do, never of what you should ; an affair of repression rather than expansion. It was perfectly moral for

instance, for the large mill-owner tacitly to condone a system of sanitary conveniences for his work-people little better than those of a Russian prison. Whereas openly to discuss the question of sanitation was in the worst possible taste.

It was largely to combat this state of things that a few of the more hopeful among us formed ourselves into a society of chosen spirits. The members were not many. They consisted of the shop assistant Claud Rodd, Strumbach's shy young man, Arthur Ransom, whose soul died every morning when he entered the warehouse at nine and came to life again at the six o'clock hour of release, Westrom, Curt Reinecke, Reggie Bissett and myself.

It occurs to me here that I have attempted little description of the physical attributes of the more amiable personages of my tale. And that principally because mere physical good looks are as little interesting as the morality which consists in avoidance. Both Westrom and Reinecke were, Heaven be thanked, as ugly as sin. There was a cut about Westrom which always moved me to the grotesque in point of comparison. Great Gable, I used to think, remembering that he was born within a morning's walk of that tremendous pile and in view of his large nose, square jaw and granite pugnacity. A hint, too, of frowning perplexity. His mind was craggy and spacious and one felt that contrariwise to Charles Lamb he would have given all the pits of all the world's theatres for a sight of Great End. Or he could be secluded and cloistral, wrapping his mind about with the sombre banners of some monkish faith. He had a fine sense of the preposterous in manners and an immense distaste for the

unusual in conduct. With the true Liberal genius for making allowances where he had no sympathy he was your Good Samaritan turned Grand Inquisitor ; a merciful judge, capable of forgiving a criminal everything but his crime. He could say surprising things. " I like goodness," I once heard him declare. " Even the Supreme Cause has got to behave itself or it doesn't have my vote."

Curt Reinecke had much of Westrom's ruggedness but the mould was gentlier. He was a Jew from Hamburg, tall, loose-limbed, of good family. He was employed by Strumbach as a *Volontär*, which means that he devilled for that amiable giant in return for a pound a week and the opportunity of learning English ways of business. It was his intention after completing his military service to take up a partnership with his wealthy brothers in Hamburg, probably remaining in Manchester as the head of their Manchester branch. This is the German form of colonisation, made possible by the fact that the young German will live on less and work harder than the young Englishman. There is no cure for what is really an insidious form of conquest other than an amendment in the immigration laws. But this is tedious and matter for the politician. You could have ransacked the whole of the German Empire and the whole of the United Kingdom without finding a more agreeable fellow than Reinecke. He radiated affability, he was incandescent with good-humour, he shone with a humility in which there was nothing servile. Add to this a charming *naïveté*, a passionate modesty and a rapturous enthusiasm for everything English in which there was no suspicion of toadyism, and you have the man.

Of Reggie Bissett I hardly know what to say except that he had an admirable taste in claret and a passion for what he would call a "monstrously well-prepared pheasant." He would spend hours concocting little notes of invitation ending: "As I am no orator, both the champagne and myself propose to be Mumm!" His worst fault was the delivery of mountainous commonplaces such as "It is extraordinary how much trash one can read if one gives one's mind to it." Or he would impart as a confidence the news that on the previous evening he had considered the advisability of smoking a second cigar, but had finally abandoned the idea. And yet he was not completely null. That is to say, his nullity was not that of the cretin, was not Geoffrey's sort, nor yet that of the toss-pot, Wally Buckley. He was the healthy, cold-tubbing Englishman of our unreadable novelists. He had a passion which absorbed him and yet of which he seldom spoke, a passion for horses. He had the mind of the perfect stable-boy; he *was* his horses. I have known him spend long winter afternoons tramping desolate fields for a glimpse of shaggy brutes herding under the lee of stone walls. Or he would spend hours in that ecstasy of contemplation which a loose-box affords, in mysterious confab with his groom, a striped and chequered notable. Horses were the only subject on which Bissett possessed eloquence, and I have heard him improvise over a mare of courage a tirade outrivalling Charlotte Brontë's on the genius of Rachel. For his horses he would have sacrificed wife, child, fortune, hope of the world to come. You will tell me that this is mania. To which I reply that the passion which is less than mania is not passion at all. Give me your veritable

passion's slave and I will wear him in my heart of hearts.

Bissett was welcomed by us not for the sake of his particular mania but because he was known to possess one. He was as rich as Westrom was respectable, and our little society found both qualities a convenient pillar. We used to meet formally once a month and informally once a week in a little café-restaurant which boasted a back room to be dignified at a pinch with the courtesy title of *cabinet particulier*. On informal occasions we would content ourselves with chops and beer in pint-pots ; at the grand monthly meetings the proprietor would put up an eight-course dinner for seven shillings and sixpence, and we would consider which of the Californian Burgundies might most fittingly precede the pale, dry, creaming Perrier-Jouët which ran away with our weekly pittances at the rate of ten shillings a bottle. Westrom was the only member of the band to whom expense mattered ; Bissett was too rich and the rest of us too poor to care.

It was *de rigueur* that discussion at these dinners should be reserved for matters of great pith and moment.

§^s iii

“ We must have a motto and we must have a programme,” said Ransom at our second meeting.

“ So long as we don't propagate anything or call ourselves a band or a brotherhood, I'm agreeable,” said Rodd. “ Why not a Society for the Abolition of Self-satisfaction among the Clergy ? ”

“ Why not ‘ The Philosophic Epicures ’ ? ” asked Bissett.

“Or ‘The Reasonable Men’? from Curt.

“I don’t think we need define what we are here for,” said Westrom. “All definitions are forms of limitation. ‘Do the good that’s nearest,’ you know.”

“A sort of general interference with the best of motives,” replied Rodd querulously, “helping lame dogs, and all that sort of thing. Not for me, thank you.”

“What about ‘The New Bohemians’?” I put in.

“None of the old ones were artists in our sense,” returned Rodd. “Mürger could write a pretty story, but neither he nor his precious painters were ‘serious.’ As far as I can make out they cared for nothing except wearing absurd trousers and silly hats and throwing away what little money they had on consumptive dressmakers. His Latin Quarter is a colossal *blague*.”

“The worst of serious fellows like Claud,” said Westrom, patting Rodd affectionately on the shoulder, “is that they will raise the moral issue. Now there’s no moral issue about a Musette and a Mimi. The thing’s just a joke.”

“Well, we’re not jokes,” Rodd answered, with a fine defiance. “We’re going to be great men, all of us. At least we intend to try,” he tailed off more humbly.

“I will do such things, what they are, yet I know not; but they shall be the terrors of the earth,” retorted Westrom.

“Lear was an old man. We are all of us out to do something, or what’s our youth for?” retorted Claud. “There’s Ned here wants to write books, Ransom thinks he can draw, Curt has got a symphony in his

head and I—well, I've a notion how to pull things to pieces. That's the poorer half of criticism, but it's a beginning. Building up comes after. You've got to clear the ground first. In any case I take it we're here to work and not to play about with women."

A long and lively debate followed, of which the upshot was that we were to call ourselves the New Bohemians. It was all very young and very ardent and perhaps not too foolish. It was determined that our society should be governed by one principle and one principle only, the strict intolerance of mental dishonesty either among ourselves or in the world at large. This settled, we next proceeded to cast about for subjects most worthy of the strong light of our single-mindedness. I think we were all of us eager to coquette with Socialism, and perhaps we thought that the arts stood in need of a leg-up.

"But we can't discuss what is most worth doing until we know what the whole world's for," said Curt logically. So with a praiseworthy idea of beginning at the beginning we decided upon an inquiry as to the latest attitude of the scientists and philosophers towards the origin and purpose of life.

"We don't want to be philosophers," said Bissett. "But we may as well know what philosophy is after and where she stands."

"In other words, we want as much of it as becomes persons of taste," said Ransom.

"I propose," went on Bissett, "that each of us takes a philosophic bloke and mugs him up. We'll all report to Reinecke, who will pool the lot. Put me down for someone pretty easy, you chaps." And we

allotted him Samuel Butler. The following is the compendium of philosophic principle to which the society was formally to subscribe:—

There is no evidence that anything exists which is without attributes. Every existing thing to be material and resolvable into primary energy which is not, so far as we know, resolvable into any more naked simplicity.

Nothing has ever occurred for which there is not a natural and material explanation, although we may not yet be advanced enough to hit upon the explanation.

The universe was probably created by the lucky or unlucky assemblage in the proper place and at the proper time of forms of energy coming together in such proportions as were necessary to create matter.

The First Cause may be devoid of the human sense of responsibility and may be unconscious of humanity. It may be unaware of itself and entirely devoid of consciousness.

There is no evidence that the emotions and impulses of man—love, hatred, kindness, self-sacrifice—are other than the reactions of matter.

There is no evidence of any essential difference between the life of man and that of a cabbage.

Man is not the centre of the universe except in the sense in which every blade of grass is the centre of the universe.

Man is neither higher nor lower than the animals, only more complex.

There is nothing mysterious about life except our ignorance of it. If by any chance all those material components contained in the body of man were to be assembled correctly energised in the correct proportions and under the correct conditions, then human life would be spontaneously created.

Nature is not benevolent but natural, and she makes no mistakes because to her there is no difference between right and wrong. To Nature disease and decay are as natural as health and growth. The ivy hurts the tree but does itself a lot of good in the process. A thistle is the result of Nature's arrangements for a thistle and she would be the last to expect to gather figs from it.

If Nature arranges for anything it will happen; if not, not. But "arranges for" must not be held to bear any mystical meaning.

It is mistaken philosophy which places man at the centre of the universe and discusses all that happens therein as it may be supposed to affect the present and future happiness of its spoiled child. The scientist must confine his questionings to the "why" and the "how" and not bother his head with subliminal "wherefores."

It is permissible to conceive a gap between Primordial Energy and the Prime Cause which we with our finite minds are bound to assume to be behind even that Energy. Within that gap or zone of the incomprehensible there is room for whatever philosophic speculation or religious faith it may please man to

entertain. From Primordial Energy downwards there is no evidence of Special Interference.

In finite matters only can there be any laying down of last words.

The discovery of even one more dimension would throw the whole of modern philosophy out of gear. Man to be prepared to accept the findings of only such philosophy as makes reservation of this very necessary pinch of salt.

“Not much of a look-out!” said Bissett, when the *bilan* was formally presented and accepted.

“Of course,” said I, “all that this means is that the incomprehensible cannot exist in its own right, and that it must be capable of being comprehended by somebody or it would not exist.”

“Why *by Somebody*?” asked Curt. “If a thing is, so it is, and further explanation is unnecessary. Besides I take it that ‘Somebody’ must not exist. There may, there must be Something already, but that isn’t necessarily Somebody. To present the First Cause with consciousness is to give to it Personality, which is to pretend to knowledge of the unknowable. I trust honourable members will pardon any rotten German.”

“In other words,” said Ransom, “what is called the inscrutable is merely evidence of lack of capacity in the scrutineers.”

“Exactly,” Westrom agreed. “The Church has always made the mistake of postulating the universe as a kind of sublime conjuring trick.”

“Whereas”—it was Rodd who spoke—“we are to

take it that when once the Prime Cause had created Primordial Energy it was content to leave it at that and not go about behind Energy's back sending a flood when it could not possibly have rained and arresting the movements of suns to please some toadying savage. And yet I suppose that it is perfectly legitimate for an honest philosopher to believe in God and a future life provided he does not insist upon other people accepting his views as to particular numbers and arbitrary forms of dogma."

"But," interposed Ransom, "the moment you have evidence for faith it surely ceases to be faith? Personally I agree with Mark that while we are here we may as well behave ourselves. You can invent a hundred extra dimensions as you call them, but you can't upset that."

"No minister or clergyman professing anything so simple could keep his berth for a week," declared Westrom. "It is quite easy to understand how in the dark ages the priests found it necessary to bamboozle the people for their own benefit. You can't expect a savage to embrace an intellectual conception for the simple reason that he has no intellect to conceive with; and therefore the priests had to invent a mystic something which the simple mind could hold in awe, to which something they tacked on a very useful code of ethical rule to suit the moral, physical and hygienic needs of the time. You certainly couldn't expect them to do this and tip the philosophers the wink."

"There's one shred of hope, surely," said Ransom. "There is not in the whole of nature, so far as I have been able to make out, any general craving of which

fulfilment is totally denied. Plants which demand the sun would not have been created in the absence of the sun. Human nature cries for something after death, and did not that something exist I doubt whether we should have been tormented by a useless craving. That animals should not demand a future existence—and one presumes they don't—seems to me an excellent reason why they should not have one. That we should demand one is an excellent reason why we should."

"Rubbish!" interjected Rodd. "Rubbish, my dear fellow. Nature is made up of cravings which are permanently denied and of which the satisfaction would be the end of the universe as we know it. Unsatisfied desire is the motive of all life and of all change. Every single atom is in a continued state of stress, the appeasement of which would lead to complete equilibrium, which in its turn would involve the cessation of all life and change. If the universe had its own way it would rush together in one nasty, indigestible, coagulated lump. As for the desire for a future life, why, that's just mental fogginess. There is no doubt that there are a great many sentimental people who find that a belief in a second existence helps to make the present one easier, and that the certainty that there is nothing to follow, that the whole scheme of things is, from a purely human standpoint, purposeless and nonsensical, might lead to race suicide. Taking these two things together, and remembering nature's infinite wiliness for propagation, you begin to see where the belief in a future state comes from. As for the bitterness of death, it seems to me that it can only lie in the persistence after death of the desire to live—in finding

the tomb a bore, in other words. Whereas I take it that with death the desire for life dies too."

"I am satisfied," began Westrom, "that whatever there may be afterwards will have more of effort in it than of stagnation. But almost as soon as you start arguing you come up against the blank wall of trying to comprehend the infinite by means of a finite intelligence. The instrument's not good enough, that's all. So far as I can see we've the choice of two impossible conceptions. Either you have to decide for a First Cause which has been the conscious ordainer of every minute and stupendous wonder of the created world, including the Coal Sack and the Milky Way, Rodd's wit and the sole of a fly's foot, or for some form of Primitive Energy which, although unconscious itself in the human sense, has evolved so great a miracle as human consciousness. Which seems to me uncommonly like the whole being smaller than its part."

"Say that the Original Cause was less complicated than what it has given rise to, and I'll agree with you," proffered Rodd.

"Let me go on a bit. I think it's a waste of time to argue about the inconceivable. All we know for certain is that no creature wills its own existence and that the world's creatures are continually multiplying. Which means that as we have been begotten so are we in duty bound not to waste our energies unlawfully but to carry on nature's purpose and the world's work in a legitimate, honourable way. I'm a family man myself," he concluded, with a gleam of fun. And this closed the discussion.

Two other subjects there were which intrigued us greatly and which we found to be very largely

inseparable. I mean Socialism and the Woman Question.

We decided that all men are not equal but that all have rights to which they are entitled with scrupulous equality. The right to go hand in hand with the obligation. Every man to give to the world his work, in return for which he is entitled to be adequately housed and nourished, to be kept in health, to be comforted and cared for in sickness, to be protected from evil-doers. Hospitals to be the concern of the State as much as the Army and the Navy. We decided that it was the State's duty to keep people from drowning, free, gratis and for nothing, and to protect children and animals from cruelty. Lifeboat Saturdays and Societies for the Prevention of This, That and the Other appeared to us to be reflections upon the State. If it be desirable that an evil be restrained, restraint to be the business of the State and not of private enterprise. We held it to be the duty of the community to keep its members reasonably amused, to supply them with drink in wholesome and adequate quantity, to teach and educate them, to convey them whithersoever they desire to go, to provide them with opportunities for holiday-making on the largest possible scale, the whole at moderate prices. We held the provision of the essentials of existence at a reasonable charge to be the affair of the commonwealth, the embellishment of life that of private enterprise. We contemplated with horror illegitimacy and prostitution, and with pity the fate of the children and the women. I think we were entirely free from heat or moral indignation and, I hope, from priggishness. "This thing is so; what is the country to do about it?" seemed

to us the only legitimate question. We even drew up an elaborate scheme of toleration which did not include the *maison tolérée* but which did provide some measure of alleviation and an asylum against the too wretched end.

Oh, we had an eye on practicability and safeguards. Westrom had expressed a fear lest we should be encouraging vice.

“That’s the old parrot-cry,” exclaimed Rodd. “Let’s do nothing to mitigate the consequences, lest we be thought to encourage the evil. You might just as well say that State orphanages are an inducement to parents to commit suicide.”

“What I am principally anxious about,” Westrom urged, “is that we shouldn’t go too fast. All progress that is to be permanent has got to take the people with it and must necessarily be slow. As good Socialists we ought to want the people to make their own laws. Consequently all law-giving can only keep pace with what the people want and want so badly that they insist upon it. We must be lenient if the law lags behind a little so as to be on the safe side.”

“Safe side!” cried Rodd bitterly. “Oh, God, as if all failure isn’t made up of leaning to the safe side! What are we all here except safe-siders? Look at Marston battering on his uncle, Ransom licking Strumbach’s boots when he ought to be telling the old man to go to hell. Look at me selling E strings and *Won’t you Buy my Pretty Flowers*, and ‘selecting’ tawdry rubbish for half-starved music-teachers because I haven’t got the pluck of the match-seller and the cab-tout. Because I won’t turn out and risk it. I verily

think those seedy individuals who show you round Port Said and blackmail you for the rest of your life are worthier of respect than I am. At least they are doing the best that is in them and I certainly am not doing the best that is in me."

There was a note of rhetoric about this which prevented it from being really moving, though later events proved there was more of sincerity about Rodd than we gave him credit for at the time. Nobody spoke for a few moments and then Westrom again took up the thread.

"Under the old individualist régime the tip was to educate the men at the top, which is an almost impossible feat. They come down from the Universities with a veneer on them. I prefer to call it a crust. It is certainly a coating which lasts their time and which can never be penetrated. I believe the only thing to do is to educate the men at the bottom. Get them to want and to insist upon good laws and we'll get good laws passed."

"All reasonable Socialists," said Curt, standing up and blushing very red, "would not talk so much about their so rotten laws. They would choose one big man and say to him 'Govern us.' So. I am only any rotten German but we Germans have progressed in spite of our Socialists. Strunbach is not a wicked man, but he is a very powerful one. You say Might is not Right. I say he is, and that Right is a fool if he does not get Might on his side also. So long as your Socialist wants his country to be weaker than any other country, so long does the boot go on his neck. That country will be greatest in Europe which is all socialist inside but which wants to be the greatest outside also.

You have too many Liberals in England and not enough Socialists. This is perhaps not English sense I am talking, but it is certainly German sense. I trust honourable members will excuse my so rotten speech."

He clicked his heels and sat down. We applauded and drank his health boisterously.

In the matter of sex we looked very largely to Westrom, who was married, and to Rodd, who had come across it in Balzac; the experiences of the rest of us having been, I suppose, largely of the furtive order. Claud was full of theories about the peril and the glamour of the woman of thirty.

"In other words," remarked Westrom, "you want a brave excuse for abandoning a woman as soon as you are tired of her. I admit it must be tremendous fun to be a rake; but I haven't any doubt that marriage with companionship and children is finer. I submit that the pursuit of women is not good enough if it is to be a lark and no more; tolerable only on condition that the women can be hurt. I have more sympathy with the fellow who seduces a village maiden in natural fashion, provided he behaves with any sort of humanity afterwards, than with your habitual blackguard. In either case he should be man enough to shoulder his responsibilities. I fancy that the thoughts of Don Juan in the poem must have been blacker than his mantle. I don't mean that he was worrying about the moral issue, but that he must have had a feeling of emptiness, of smallness, a *frittering* sense like that of the gambler who has lost his all in petty stakes and has never had the thrill of the really big throw. I agree that chastity in itself is no better than silence or motionlessness or any other negation that may be a

virtue on occasion. Passionate love comes to an end. We've got to change, to mellow into something with passion in its bones. All life that is worth living, and love is a part of life, is a matter of plodding, of keeping on when you are tired and long after you are tired. Even Claud will admit that the great artist is not without his terrible moments of exhaustion and lack of confidence. And yet he plods. I admit I am a Puritan."

"Es fällt kein Meister von Himmel," said Curt.

"Exactly. And neither do lovers fall from heaven," Westrom replied with an air of finality. "Being a good lover is thundering hard work."

But Rodd was not to be put off.

"I'm not sure that we mean the same thing," he said. "What Westrom is talking about sounds to me uncomfortably like a German life force. All this toughening and bracing is a dull job. I want a woman to turn to when I've done my work, and I don't want to talk to her about my work. I want distraction. The rôle of husband seems to me to be rather ridiculous."

"You got that from Vronsky in *Anna Karenina*," said Curt.

"But what of the women?" Westrom insisted. "Are they content to be looked upon as distractions? Suppose they were to use us for their amusement?"

"They do," said Rodd, "only you won't see it and daren't admit it. There's a magnificent passage in one of Balzac's letters to Madame Hanska in which he criticises his own *Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*. He says that the story is the greatest comedy of morals—morals, mind you, not manners—in existence;

that the subject of a woman of thirty-seven lying like a Trojan to convince her fourteenth lover of her virtue belongs to all countries and all times. The crux of the thing, he says, was to justify the lies by the force of the woman's passion, and I don't think that either Balzac or Diana bothered their heads about 'companionship with children.' He calls the story a masterpiece and one of the diamonds of his crown."

"I won't deny that Balzac is a good witness for you," said Westrom. "He's the sort of ton weight which shows the way the wind was blowing in his time. Now I have admitted I am a Puritan, but I don't want you fellows to take me for a lean and desiccated St Anthony. As Bunthorne says, 'there's more innocent fun in me than a casual spectator might imagine.'"

Most of our discussions resolved themselves into a set duel between Westrom and Rodd, and the foregoing is typical. As far as our Socialism went the mould in which we formed ourselves was more or less permanent. We were young then and liked nothing better than to burn our boats. I have two letters which show that Rodd at least never wavered in his belief in the communal spirit and the supreme fitness of the people for self-government :

"Let me call your attention to two leaders in our precious party journals. *The Thunderer* denounces the Prime Minister's dilatoriness and points out that nothing has been done this session. *The Morning Warrior* calls fiercely for a dissolution and says that further activity under the Prime Minister means disaster to the Conservative Party for some time to

“ come. What are the Tories coming to when their faithful watchdogs bark like this ?

“ Did you read the Prime Minister’s amusing speech last night ? I always thought, and I find from Dicey that I am correct, that the Septennial Act was an act to prevent a Government from stopping in power for a longer period than seven years, not to enable it to stop in until seven years have expired. The Prime Minister’s speech shows either an inveterate disinclination or a hopeless inability to interpret his authorities correctly. It is difficult to suppose that he does not understand the difference between an ‘enabling’ and a ‘disabling’ statute. He has only to ask his law officers. His other precedents are entirely misleading and remind one of Chamberlain. I suppose it is impossible in English politics for a man to attain to the highest office under the Crown without considerable force of character, and that every Prime Minister we have had for a hundred years has firmly believed his remaining in office to be essential to the safety and welfare of the country. Mr Gladstone appears to have held this view with greater persistence than anybody else, but no matter. Presumably, therefore, there is no little astuteness or trick of debate, self-deception or hoodwinking of the enemy to which a highly principled minister will not descend and feel justified in descending to keep his country from the abyss. This granted, what a game party politics become !

“ The Prime Minister’s reference to Gladstone’s refusal to resign after a defeat on a snap division is quite in point or would be, did he not *omit the point*, which is that Gladstone offered to resign *if* the

“Tories were prepared to come in. This they refused. Gladstone then said: ‘Very well, if you don’t come in why should I go out?’ and refused to go to the country. But even then he afterwards said he was wrong in not going to the country.

“The Prime Minister quotes as a precedent the very case most favourable to his opponents! Does he really need to be told that the true test as to whether a Prime Minister should stay in power is not whether he can, by beating up his forces and muzzling the newspapers, command a majority, but whether he honestly believes that he has the confidence of the country? *It is the people who choose the Government and not the House of Commons.*

“If after a defeat in the House a Government can still maintain a majority, and if the leader honestly believes he has the confidence of the country then he *may* be justified in stopping in. If either essential is absent then he is not justified. As to the old argument about endangering the peace of Europe by a change of Government and the certainty of the Liberals giving away the Empire to Germany in handfuls, what utter nonsense it is! And dangerous nonsense too. If the Tories can put forward such a plea, so could the Liberals in like circumstance. Imagine a Liberal Government engaged in a European war and making the usual mess of things. Defeated in the House they could calmly point to the Tory precedent and say: ‘We refuse to go out because of the precarious condition of foreign politics.’

“I take it that no politician is entitled to use an argument which in the mouth of an opponent would honestly seem to him to be a menace to his country’s

“welfare. It may be that under such ruling as this the
“game of party politics would come to an end. I do
“not think that this would be a grave matter. . . .”

The second letter was written some three days before his death, during the great German offensive of March, 1918. It runs :

“Some starveling, some dried neat’s-tongue, some
“tailor’s yard, some sheath, some bow-case, some vile
“standing-tuck—what the devil is this?—of a political
“ass has been getting on to his hind legs and braying.
“He says with reference to the demands of appellants
“under the Military Service Act to be legally repre-
“sented before the tribunals, that ‘*the question is one
“of human life.*’ I read further that the statement
“was received with general cheering. Neither the
“fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to’t with a more
“riotous appetite than our public fools to their folly.
“You will gather that I am in something of a fury.
“*Of course* it is a question of human life, in the sense
“that every issue before a nation at war is ultimately a
“question of human life. In any civilised community
“all lives belong to the State always ; it is only during
“a war that our sodden wits are able to apprehend
“this. To-day the life of every man, called up or not,
“belongs to the State—even the Germans know that
“—and the determining factor before the tribunals is
“not human life but communal usefulness.

“The lawyer should be called in, not by the appellant
“and for the usual purpose of confusing the issue, but
“by the State and the appellant acting together, and
“in cases where there is genuine difficulty in deciding

“whether a man is likely to serve his country better
“as a soldier or as a ’bus-conductor. To suggest that
“legal aid should be employed on behalf of an appellant
“as against the State is to assume the worst type of
“*embusqué*, or traitor if you like it better. Of course,
“a statement that the question is one of communal
“usefulness would not have roused a single cheer, even
“in the House of Commons. Neither the public nor
“its representatives have budged an inch during the
“last twenty years in their attitude of indifference to
“the communal question. Politicians go on with their
“individualist prattle, and audiences to use about one
“fiftieth of the intelligence with which it is polite to
“credit them. I doubt whether we humans have as
“many brains as the animalculæ in a pond. God must
“use an enormous microscope to perceive us !”

§ iv

But all our meetings were not cast in sombre mood. More cheerful was the one at which it was decided that Ransom should leave Strumbach’s. We had by this time established a code of procedure. Each monthly meeting was convened with a definite object and the “Strumbach” dinner was called to decide: first, which were the two best lines of English poetry; second, whether we would admit to the *cénacle* young Oscar Krauss, son of the mayor and a wealthy youngster with some intellectual pretensions; and third, what to do about Ransom and his employer. I shall take these matters in their proper order. But first you must know that at each meeting members were expected to bring to the notice of the society the

bourgeois enormities detected by them since the previous meeting. It will be noted that we managed to combine with our Socialism a very fine brand of aristocratic scorn.

Reinecke had been at pains to explain to us the meaning of a word partly Jewish partly Hamburg slang, which stands for all errors of taste and tact, all pretentiousnesses, stupidities, fussinesses, effusivenesses, vulgarities, the whole caboodle of German emphasis soever—the word *kemach*. Nearly all Germans, explained Reinecke, are *kemach*; their mental furniture, like that of the boarding-house mantelshelf, is one colossal *kemach*. The luggage with which our friend had set out from Germany had included a dress-shirt embroidered with forget-me-nots and a motto. This atrocity worn at our first meeting was then and there torn off its owner's back and cremated. The whole Victorian era was one huge *kemach*, we had agreed. The word eluded Westrom, whereas the rest of us shivered at the mere thought that we might in the remotest way be affected with the mysterious taint. An album was instituted for the recording of all authenticated instances of the *kemach*, and we found in the daily press our happiest hunting-ground.

On the night of the Strumbach dinner Curt led off.

A young music-hall star seeing an alleged photograph of herself "in diaphanous attire" displayed for sale had written :

" Other actresses being equally injured with myself, I feel it urgent that I should take action. That we should have the good fortune to stand well with the

public is no reason why we should be represented as having posed before the camera in nightdresses or other indecorous garb."

This was solemnly accorded a place in the register.

Ransom then rose, crimson with pleasure. He had bagged the following :—

"It was at the conclusion of the play, when the hero and heroine were locked in a tender embrace, that the act-drop refused to work. Long the lovers stood. At last, realising the situation, they separated, bowed low and withdrew. The safety curtain then took the place of his *ornate but more capricious sister*."

To this also were accorded the honours of perpetuity.

I followed with an account of a duchess who had eloped

"*without impedimenta save a few serviceable jewels*."

This was the best I had been able to find and I was grieved that it was turned down.

"I've got you all stiff," said Rodd, jumping to his feet. "I've discovered the most colossal *kemach* since—he hesitated for a worthy comparison—since our great Queen was scandalised at the presentation of '*Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt et son fils*.'" He pulled out of his pocket what appeared to be a copy of a musical paper.

"Look at this," he shouted, waving the thing in the air, "it's this week's copy of *The High C!*" His voice dropped to the hush of awe as he read, after the manner of one reciting a miracle :

“A composer’s *tonnage* varies with the music. For instance Chopin’s *Polonaise* in A flat has a passage which takes two minutes to play. During these two minutes the total pressure brought to bear on the keys is equal to three tons. It would not, however, be safe to base a general estimate on these figures as Chopin has many passages which require the greatest delicacy of execution. The weight of an hour’s playing of this composer varies from twelve to as much as eighty-four tons.”

And he sat down with a beatific smile.

Bissett rose, bowed gravely to Claud, and called for a magnum of champagne.

“It shall be suitably honoured,” he said. “Gentlemen, charge your glasses. I give you Chopin’s tonnage!”

We drank the toast in silence and then Claud with a little hysterical laugh hurled his glass into the fireplace. We all followed suit except of course Westrom, and then Reinecke, weeping on Claud’s shoulder, led him round the room in a slow, bear-like waltz.

“Himmel,” he said, “it is enough to run about the trees. The man who wrote that is no ordinary *kemach*. I enjoy him famously.”

Comparative quiet being restored, a discussion was then entered upon as to whether you could wear away a rose by smelling it, a tree by looking at it, or an orchestra by listening to it with millions of ears. For half-an-hour brilliant if false analogies were adduced in sufficient quantity to have carpeted a field. Next we fell to decision of the boyish question as to the two finest lines in English poetry.

Ransom led off with

And drunk delight of battle with my peers
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

from *Ulysses*.

Westrom was urgent on behalf of :

O ! how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wrackful siege of battering days. . . .

“There's no moral issue there, anyhow,” he said,
I fancied a trifle wistfully.

I wanted the familiar :

Write loyal cantons of contemned love.

and

Haloo your name to the reverberate hills,

but they were ruled out on account of the intervening line. Other suggestions I forget, just as I forget which way the verdict went.

Young Krauss's application to be admitted as a chosen spirit caused us some heart-searching.

“What's he done to be admitted ?” asked Rodd.

“What's he done to be refused ?” countered Westrom.

Bissett recalled the incident of a cousin of his who had been elected to the Oriel Club, for which the essential qualification was literary or artistic eminence, on the ground that he had played half-back for Scotland.

“Why not set him a test-paper ?” asked Ransom.
“Not the ordinary stuff that crammers want, but a paper to find out what his type of mind is—whether he's our sort, in fact. It won't matter if he answers all wrong ; the point is how he shapes.”

We joyfully agreed and proceeded then and there to draw up the paper. Fortunately I still have the menu card on the back of which I made notes of the twelve questions. It would take too long to set forth the intricate arguments for and against each poser, and it is perhaps unnecessary to specify their individual sponsors. I will content myself with the list :

1. Are rabbits granted an extraordinary number of young as compensation for being an easy prey, or is their destruction in large numbers a direct consequence of there being so many of them ?

2. All life is, *au fond*, at once sensual and moral. Discuss this.

3. Madame Vauquer was *née*—what ?

4. What English monarch was the most unconscionable time *living* ?

5. The bot-fly lays her eggs on the hairs of horses' legs. The horse licks its legs and swallows the eggs, which next appear in the form of grubs in the animal's hide, whence they hatch out. Flowers are fertilised by the pollen which clings to the feet of the bee in search of food. Compare the felicity of these arrangements with the ingenuity of the human marriage settlement.

6. Have trees a future life ?

7. He that will not work neither shall he eat. Connect this with the House of Lords.

8. You are walking along a lonely road in India with a native servant. The boy picks up an object which you take to be a diamond of greater value than the Koh-i-noor, and which he refuses to sell. How would you dispose of the body ?

9. What in your opinion has a man to live for who has made as much money as he wants and who has seen his sons established and his daughters married ?
10. What would you do with a million pounds ?
11. How would you propose to spend eternity ?
12. Write a short essay justifying your existence.

Young Krauss made the mistake of not taking the paper seriously. He returned flippant answers and was cast back into the outer darkness.

The main business of the session was heralded when Bissett, rapping for silence, said : " Now then, Arthur, tell us all about it."

Ransom hesitated, then began : " Well, you fellows, it's like this. I can't stand Strumbach any longer. I don't mind his lying and thieving, his little red eyes, his vulgar generosity. He's a successful man and they're his trade-marks. But he's getting hold of me, he's making his life mine, and I can't bear it." He paused for a moment and went on : " I feel that I'm being caught in the wheels of some terrible machine, the machine called greed. Greed is the one ice-cold thing in hell and it's numbing me. It's terrible to have to live with it. It freezes up everything that makes your soul your own. Then there are times when I feel that I am being devoured by some giant spider. Every time I go down to that awful warehouse I feel the darkness closing over me, literally. I'm always last in my room ; I brood so during the day that I get behind with my work. To-night when I left the office I was the last except for a lot of pale-faced boys copying letters when they ought to have been playing cricket. They will be there till ten. Often

when I'm all alone except for these fellows copying, ugly little spirits come out from behind the piles, and leer and gibber at me. No one sees them, but they're there. And then I think of Strumbach and I can't see his face. I only know that it looks at me from his desk in the dark and that his mouth is restless and wet and slavers at me. Or he will creep up behind me with that stealthy tread of his and put his soft hand on my shoulder. And I can feel his polished nails dig into my flesh and I turn round and there's no one there."

"Steady," said Westrom.

"It's my job to devil for Strumbach, to tell lies for him, to bear false witness to order. When he has a customer it's to me that he turns for corroboration. 'Didn't ve pay sevenpence for zis?' he will say, and I shall stammer and blush and try to forget it cost fivepence. It is always on these occasions that I feel the old man's power over me. There's something fascinating about his small, astute eyes; they're like the eyes of a rogue elephant. I think he hypnotises me and his customers too. At least they never notice my hesitation, and perhaps I don't hesitate. The old man will stand there, venerable, patriarchal, with one hand round his customer's neck and the other pawing the poor fool's face, until I give an answer. He has a little red devil—nobody sees it but me—which stands at his elbow and jogs it whenever his patron is in danger of forgetting something. He's wonderful, I tell you. When he's in the full passion of selling, a blue flame encircles him, comes up from between the floor-boards and casts a glare over him. Strumbach is evil but great. There's not a merchant in Manchester who wouldn't be Strumbach if he could. He's so real, so

earnest, so devoid of affectation, like all the men of his race! You can see his ancestors on the temple steps. Put Strumbach among them with a little table and a few shekels and he wouldn't waste time thinking about the Eastern sky and the incongruity of it all. He'd be selling. I don't believe Christ would have dared to overturn *his* table."

And the outburst over, Ransom put his head down and we saw his shoulders shake.

"But what do you want us to do?" Westrom asked after a pause.

The boy lifted his head.

"I want you to help me to pluck up courage and to tell no more lies. I want not to be a coward, to recover my self-respect, to do honourable work and be paid for honourable work."

"The rate's low," said Rodd. "Better go navvying. What exactly is it that has brought you to this pitch? Haven't you known for years that you can't serve both God and Strumbach?"

"Nothing in particular has happened," replied Ransom. "It's the drop of water and the wearing away of the stone, I suppose. I've been selling all the afternoon to a loud-voiced, ill-mannered German—the worst sort. Strumbach was behind me and his mere presence reduced me to such a state of terror that at last I sold a lot of cloth which we haven't got and can't possibly buy. Sooner or later I shall have to make a clean breast of it to the old man. But that isn't all. We've been putting Hegner and Brandt's registered stamp on our goods and trusting to luck not to be found out. The boat containing our last shipment met with an accident and has had to put back

to Liverpool. The whole cargo is damaged and the insurance people are selling the stuff for what it'll fetch. I've got to go down to the docks to-morrow and buy up all the picee-goods. The old man daren't risk any of them coming back on the market, even to the fent-dealers."

"Well?"

"Well, I just want the stuff to come back, and I want the old man to get hit and hard hit. It's the chance of a lifetime. It means the sack for me, of course."

"You can't have it both ways," said Bissett. "You can't both want to get free and be frightened of the sack at the same time."

"Oh, can't you?" threw in Rodd. "I knew a man who went out to buy a pistol to shoot himself with and was so upset on finding that he had walked under a ladder that he put it off to a more auspicious occasion."

"It's not getting the sack that worries me. Of course I must go to Liverpool. So long as I am Strumbach's servant I must obey orders."

Westrom nodded.

"I'm thinking of plucking up enough courage to give him notice as soon as I get back. I want you fellows to advise."

So we went into committee.

We elicited from Ransom that he had no ties of any sort and a hundred and seventy pounds in the bank.

"Enough to live on for two years," said Westrom.

"Three," said Rodd; "I've done it."

We looked to Westrom.

"Well," he said slowly, "it comes to this. Here is a fellow getting three hundred and fifty a year, has what

you'd call good prospects and is profoundly unhappy. If he had old parents or a wife and family I do not say that it would not be his duty to bear with unhappiness. We don't all suffer misery, perhaps, but most of us have to put up with a very middling kind of bliss. Now Ransom has no need to put up with anything. He is at perfect liberty to develop into a great artist, a magnificent criminal or any one of the stupendous things that bring wretchedness in their train. Ransom wants to be an artist; he is sure of the zeal and the ardour but hesitates as to the ability. He's frightened for his bread and butter. Am I right?"

Ransom nodded.

"Very well, then. He has as many years or months as a hundred and seventy pounds will go into to find out whether he has ability and persistence. If he fails he'll be miserable, but then he is going to be miserable anyhow. I give it as my opinion that no man ever made a throw with so little risk. In fact, it isn't glorious enough. It's nearly sane, and I expect that will take some of the edge off for you high-flyers."

And so it was settled.

Strumbach made no difficulty at all about Ransom's leaving, insisting only that he should go at once. He would have no half-servants, as he called them, their minds elsewhere, their bodies still drawing his pay. The boy told us that the old man put his arm round his neck and led him gently down the stairs.

"Business, he was never cut out for you. I saw that long ago, but I never discharge anybody even though I haf made a mistake. My boy, I wish you all successes. Ven you are a big man already, you shall baint my

bortrait. Und if you haf need of Strumbach till then is he not always here ? So ! ”

And with that he gently pushed his clerk through the big door and into the sunlit street.

When Ransom came to himself he found that he was holding in his hand a fifty-pound note.

§ v

And now I must tell about Clare at the price of recalling old humiliations. I know nothing more tragic than for the cloud-capped towers and solemn temples which are youth's passion to fade into thin and less than thin remembrance. I will not have it that the first meetings of lovers are only the senses' stir. I will not have it, most passionately will I not have it, that my ardour for Clare Tremblow was not in the beginning a fine thing. I was content to touch the hem of her dress, her hand ; I was prepared for the lover's abasements and humiliations. Once more I must suppose this to be a part of Nature's cunning. For those whom passion does not affright she lays her lustiest snare ; for those who would refine life to an abstraction she weaves a more delicate lure. It is the normal commonplace that love must take its stand on the eternal, your mistress's hand smell of immortality. It is the weakling refiner who insists on the trick of spirituality. I could ransack the poets to prove that the monstrosity in love, as Troilus has it, is indeed that the will is infinite and the performance limited, but in a more ethereal sense than that rude hero's. Agreed that "love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." Agreed, passionately, since the change is in

the beloved alone. Your true needle is constant to the pole howsoever the pole change ; it is the lover who should beware his proper flaw. I could descant at length upon the now stale and little remarkable theme, the descent through rapture to habit. Let us lighten the misery of that grey decline with the recognition that at least they were heights from which we fell. I am not disposed to pour scorn on those eager victims of the constant tumble, for ever picking themselves up and for ever falling. Some there are who have the very devil's knack of falling out of love, and the measure of their disillusion is the measure of their renewed hope. Every true lover knows that pressure of living which is higher than the normal. The air he breathes is rarer, the blood is wine in his veins. He is a martyr demanding a slower fire, a fanatic insisting that the sun be brought nearer his lidless eyes. He is in ecstasy, and it is this ecstasy and not the baser satisfactions which are passion's real stir. What I am driving at is that there was beauty in my relationship to Clare.

To begin with she was called not Clare but Clara—a name for which I have nearly as great a detestation as for Cora. Cora belongs essentially to a Red Indian's squaw, though I know not to what jumble of childish reading I may attribute this. Clara is the middle-aged Englishwoman, with sharp inquisitorial eye and hair strained to a knot. The Gadgets, Twinneys and Limpkins of this world are called Clara. This is not an insanity ; there is a philosophy of names. Who could conceive a Rosalind that was not straight as a peeled wand, a Viola whose nose was less than tip-tilted, a Portia who should use features other than those of Ellen Terry ? The change from Clara to Clare—which is a beautiful

name—was decreed the first evening I met her coming from work in one of Manchester's dingiest suburbs. Think you that heroines should all be dressed in silks and satins? I declare that my mistress shall be of the class and wear the dress I say she shall. I remember that she wore a straw hat none too trim and that she wore it a little to one side. The face under the hat? "*Item*, two lips, indifferent red; *Item*, two grey eyes with lids to them." Oh, simple romancers who have not learnt from your master and think you may befool your readers into taking your woman at catalogue value. I know whether I am pleased without a detailed map of countenance. If red hair delights me then shall Manon Leseaut be flame-coloured and Emma Bovary too, Elizabeth Bennet and Lorna Doone, insignificant La Vallière and most sad Tess. I am not concerned with the particular prettiness of Clare, nor even whether she would have pleased other eyes than mine. To me she was beautiful, with a beauty of the sombre, sullen order; her hair raven-black and rebellious. Her countenance showed a capacity for immense resentment.

"Why don't you put your hat on straight?" I asked, stopping dead in front of her and without any of the common manœuvring.

"Because I was too tired to bother," she replied simply. She was in no way startled at the direct address, and yet I had the feeling that it was the first time that this had happened to her. I proposed that we should stroll in a little park near by and listen to the band.

"I haven't had my tea," she objected.

I took her to a pastrycook's and we made some

extraordinary meal. Then we walked slowly to the park and sat down on an empty form and listened to a police band—what the devil have the police to do with music?—and watched the dying sun set a last display for our especial benefit. Slowly the fronts of the mean houses surrounding the park turned to amber, and their broken roofs to turquoise. You would have said the sheen of pigeons' breasts. The cracked and dingy windows, blind eyes in commonplace countenances, shone with that glory of molten gold which is so rare a spectacle of the town and the commonest property of the sea. I have only to behold this ordinary miracle in the westward-facing windows of preposterous esplanades to bring back the memory of Clare. We sat, and I held her hand unaffectedly and without embarrassment. We watched the shadows lengthen and the night grow violet. A hansom jingled past and its bell was of purest silver. Lamps were lit for the players in the bandstand and the world took on a fairy quality. We said little; there seemed so little that need be said. The musicians were a trifle noisy, but apart from them the world was very still. Suddenly Clare shivered and stood up.

“I must be going,” she said.

I did not delay her and she would not let me accompany her beyond the gates. Then in answer to my entreaty: “Yes, to-morrow if you like. At the same time. But I shall have had my tea.”

We shook hands and she went lightly away.

The following evening was wet beyond lovers' possibilities, and also the next day. The third evening saw me approaching the park gate with all a lover's trepidations. Would she be there? Might she not

have been run over in the interval or attacked by some disease? And I pictured her in a workshop entangled among wheels, and a thousand other tragedies. So all young lovers. But none of these terrible things had happened.

“That’s two nights I’ve been wet through,” she said petulantly, and I had to make for my lesser courage what apologies were possible.

We sat there till the stars came lazily out and long after. There was no band—the police may not be musical more than once a week—and we talked. I do not remember that in three hours we said anything of importance. I did not kiss her. After a time I noticed that her hands were work-stained and her shoes not too defiant of weather. She refused all word as to where she worked and the nature of her work, as to where she lived and what her family. She was as silent about herself as a star or a flower. I was sure that she was not a servant; she lacked the pert coquetry which is the badge of that sad tribe. She knew nothing of manners but I swear she was not common. Just as in this world you cannot have money without the spurious coin, so you cannot have manners without their counterfeit, which is commonness. Clare was a young savage and it was impossible for her to feign a sentiment or to be other than her natural self. Her frankness was complete and could be disconcerting.

I cannot help thinking it curious that I, with my considerable knowledge of the most wide-awake authors, should have been so much less aware of life than this clear-eyed, illiterate girl. Thanks to Rodd’s coaching I was supremely versed in the resentment of the abandoned mistress; I could have told

you how Gabriel-Jean-Anne-Victor-Benjamin-Georges-Ferdinand-Charles-Edouard-Rusticoli de la Palférine wiped his razors on some dancer's love letters ; I could have reckoned to a hundred thousand francs the cost to Nucingen of his passion for Esther ; could have made it clear how Lucien hanged himself, but not for love. I suppose there was not an intrigue in the Human Comedy of which I was not aware down to the most subtle of its ramifications. The brilliant Rastignac, the super-dandy de Marsay and that magnificent scoundrel Maxime de Trailles were never out of my thoughts. And yet it was Clare and not I who had an accurate understanding of the implications in which we were soon to be involved.

Towards the end of September we discovered that that particular summer's breath was not more likely than any other to hold out against the siege of autumn. More plainly, evenings began to fall chill and the police to give themselves up wholly to policing. We took to meeting at the humbler theatres of the town where I gleaned what conviction in an actor may be, provided his hearers be sufficiently simple. I learned that the matter of these shocking plays—the shivering flower-girl wrapped in her virtue and meagre shawl, the starving urchin with the cut and bleeding feet, the comic, kindly policeman—may be the very stuff of life in the slums. I learned to see realism and not melodrama in that virtue whose choice is between chastity and a meal. My passion for seeing life honestly dates from this time. Clare was not afraid of the realism of the slums and I was possessed with an immense curiosity. We would walk hand in hand through the lowest and most dangerous streets. Those who live in

the comfortable security of parlours know not what life is.

It was in one of these tawdry, tenth-rate booths that I heard the most remarkable of lines, a line never to be bettered in the finest playhouses of the world. It was a drama of Lancashire life. A stalwart stone-mason, rough and honest in his corduroys, addressing a bundle of poverty-stricken rags threw at her a 'My lass, I've four pun' a week, and the missus thinks I'm getting three. I doan't know as I want to have owt to do wi' thee, but tha can have the odd 'un till summat turns up.' Whereupon the pretty wretch, sturdily: "But I can't take it, John. I'm an honest lass. I can't take it for nothing."

And I felt Clare tremble.

Surely the problem was magnificently stated. Alas that the author had not the courage of his promise and that the play petered out in evasion and shunning. Since no melodramatic hero may keep pace with his first fine careless quixotism nor villainously elineh a bargain, so it seemed that the girl must hug her innocence and starve. Luckily the stalwart's stumbling-block of a wife died of consumption in the fifth act as a consequence of having been unfaithful in the first, which considerably eased the dramatist's path. But I have never forgotten the line.

With the approach of winter I noticed that Clare began to look pinched and thin, that she did not wear many changes of dress, and that if her cloak got wet through one night it would still be wet the next. She had, it seemed, no other. And I began to insist upon a visit to the confectioner's every evening whether she pretended to having had tea or not, and from time

to time I would slip small sums of money into the pocket of her little jacket. One evening Clare faced me suddenly and said: "This must stop, Ned; I can't go on taking your money. I'm as straight as the girl in the play."

I do not remember that I made any answer.

It was difficult to find someone to talk to about Clare. I avoided Westrom as one instinctively avoids those good, unswerving natures whose warnings are repressive and uncongenial. Equally I avoided Rodd as being too brilliant a fellow to carry any serious moral ballast. Bissett was too much the man of the world and Ransom had gone. I had no other friends and so turned to Reinecke.

"It is a so rotten thing to harm a girl," said Curt, "and the Englishman is very much afraid of it. But I am a German and Germans have an all-roundness in their way of looking at things. It is bad to be a girl's lover; that makes miserable for her. It is bad to marry her; that makes foolish for us. Once in Paris I dined with a Frenchman who had married his mistress. He wanted to eat *Œufs à la Cocotte* but did not dare to order. No, you cannot marry her. You must not see her any more. If Nature makes the so stupid mistake of letting people fall in love out of their class that is no reason why civilisation and culture should make mistakes also. There are countries in which a man may have many wives and when he has ennui he gives them food and money and puts them on one side. Civilisation says that is wrong."

"A great poet has declared that we must love one woman only and worship her through years of noble deeds," I said fatuously.

“Then let Nature arrange that until you meet the so wonderful woman with whom this miracle is possible you meet no other pleasant and agreeable girl. I knew once in Buenos Ayres a little French actress who had been deserted by her manager. The swine had run away with her money and she had now no engagement to make more money with. She was too honourable to run about the streets and so she waited for *le bon Dieu* to help her. I acted this person and paid four hundred pesas to rescue the poor girl from the hands of people who make much money out of this kind of misfortune. I sent her back to Paris with her fare paid and some money in the pocket. Now this would be a beautiful story if Curt Reinecke had asked nothing in return. I suppose if I had left her to starve that would have been considered virtue.”

“You would be kicked by any self-respecting man for talking like this,” I said.

“Any self-respecting man would kick himself for speaking what he really thinks,” retorted Curt.

The conversation did not make matters much clearer. In the meantime my relations with Clare remained unspoiled.

§ vi

A letter from Claud Rodd :

20 SHUFFLEBOTTOM'S CROSS,
CRAWLEY BRIDGE.

It is only the intellectually lost, my dear Ned, who write letters because they have news. I have nothing to say and am therefore full of matter.

My present mood is very Balzacian. *Le vieux monsieur* has me in his toils ; it is an awful thought that there is nobody of the young generation who knows anything about him except ME. Your ignorance is still pitiful ; you might almost be a Frenchman ! Do you think you could tell me what ultimately became of Madame de Bauséant and by whom her house was inhabited after her betrayal ? Do you know whom Maxime de Trailles or Rastignac or Ajuda-Pinto married ? I'm in the middle of *Le Député d'Arcis*. Charles Rabon's continuation is marvellous and there's hardly a line to which one can point and say " That's not Balzac ! " He has had the tact to fill up with some of the lesser-known characters, le Comte et la Comtesse de l'Estorade, Madame de Camps, MM. de Rhétoré, de Ronquerolles and others, which rounds off the Comedy splendidly. And he resuscitates Vautrin out of sheer daring. That arch-roué Maxime de Trailles plays an immense part. He marries a young girl with a dowry of over a million, which seems likely to be his last achievement ; and we are told that on the news of his marriage "*son carrossier, son tailleur, enfin tous ses créanciers firent des illuminations !*"

I am, I think, more Balzacian now than at any former time ; I do not remember ever to have been so Balzacian. Your knowledge of him is superficial, mine fundamental. You have an inkling of the general plan and the big junctions of the Human Comedy ; what you don't know is the inner workings, the small roadside stations, and where Balzac's engine stopped to take up water. If I fault him at all it is that he can never be less than stupendous. He ranges the whole world but does not move easily on the lower slopes. He can be sublime

without achieving the graceful, and good honest fun is at all times beyond him. But where he is unrivalled is in his dissection of human folly. Take the divine simplicity of César Birotteau, the cunning imbecility of Crevel, the crass stupidity of Bargeton and the lovable absurdities of the old maid Rose Cormon. "*Mais, ma chère, c'est si naturel d'avoir des enfants.*" I should sometimes be tempted to think that Balzac despises, were it not that this is the one thing a great mind may not do. I feel that he often lacks sympathy and that in this respect he is more of a transcribing machine than an artist. In fact, Balzac is not an artist at all in the sense that art is selective. He is comprehensive, God in a world of his own creating. He writes down in the simplest way possible and with no time for fine phrases the entire human animal, complete in all it does and says down to the last shadow of a thought that trembles for a moment at the back of the creature's brain. He turns his subject completely inside out, shows you its mental and moral intestines and then packs him neatly up again, dismissing the poor bewildered thing with a contemptuous pat on the head. By the way I have been unfaithful to him lately to the extent of re-reading Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale*. And yet despite my increasing admiration for this book I am more than ever convinced that Flaubert could not fill a large canvas. Just as I can never write seriously upon any subject without submerging myself fathoms below any possible meaning, so Flaubert cannot leave a situation without so thoroughly engrossing you in the handling of it that you forget the scene on which it is dependent and are without curiosity as to the scene which is to come.

But he has pages which never cloy, from which the last drops of beauty will never be wrung. Read the passage beginning "*Des femmes nonchalamment assises dans les calèches.*" Isn't this *our* Paris, our very own Paris, Paris in *our* moods, never mind hers? Balzac had no time for such a sentence as "*Madame Vatnaz mangea à elle seule le buisson d'écrevisses, et les carapaces sonnaient sous ses longues dents.*"

I suppose the book is what stupid people would call a sermon. Certainly I do not know how any man is going to take to himself a mistress other than cynically after reading the account of Frédéric's waning passion for Rosanette. *Ses paroles, sa voix, son sourire, tout vint à lui déplaire, ses regards surtout, cet œil de femme éternellement limpide et inepte, mais un goût des sens âpre et bestial l'entraînait vers elle, illusions d'une minute qui se résolvaient en haine.* It's as discouraging as the major prophets! Neither Balzac nor Flaubert are "good for people to read." The one excites to madness, the other drugs to indifference. I sometimes wonder whether other people besides ourselves make more account of books than of life. Are we abnormal? I swear that Balzac has destroyed every vestige of any moral sense I ever possessed. This is not the same thing as saying that he is immoral, but rather that he unfits you for the humdrum of life. What do I care for anything that can happen to me at Shufflebottom's Cross so long as I have the surge and surf of the great Pandemonium in my ears? Enough for to-night. *Je te laisse pour la Maréchale. Elle est enceinte.*

Le boulevard Croix de Shufflebottom avec ses lumières, ses splendeurs, le va-et-vient de ses riches équipages, ses

femmes étincelantes nonchalamment assises dans les calèches, ses lions (ah, voilà Monsieur le Vicomte Wally de Buckley dans le four-wheeler de Madame la Marquise de Runnelles, née Runnel tout court). C'est là, mon cher, la vie telle que nous l'avons rêvée. Cet hôtel-là, le numéro vingt, entouré de toutes ces richesses, mérite d'être connu. Là les dîners superbes, le mutton-chop ou le rump-steak suivi d'une bribe de fromage dit Cheshire, le Bass à perdre la raison, les cigares à quatre sous. Là rien de vulgaire, rien de bourgeois, rien de commun. Les conversations sur la littérature, la peinture, la musique; les réunions d'artistes, les causeries spirituelles et les fines débauches—un salon, quoi? Mais sur le boulevard, c'est autre chose. Là, la foule vomie des usines, des workshops, des mille endroits où l'on gagne ce qu'on appelle le spending-brass, la foule infecte parade dans les rues puantes, Là, on sent le fried-fish et les chips. Là, on entend les Chase-me! des gens à shawl. Quand vient la nuit on frôle l'amour impudique, dénué de poésie. . . .

Last night I had the temerity to draw my weary bones to the theatre, unable to resist the promise of *Aspasia*, *Adapted from the famous French Novel of that name*. The hoardings foretold *A Picture of Night Life in Paris*. It would have been indecent if it had not been farcical. Never have I seen the Lancashire atmosphere so well put on the stage as in this artless reaching out after the French. The thing began with a *Bal-masque* (*sic*) of which the principal figure was one calling herself "La Pipotte—a loose woman." *Aspasia* herself reminded me of nothing so much as a fifth-rate Polly Eccles. She was enormous. She appeared at the top of a rickety staircase crowned with a wreath of

red paper roses with the device "Vive l'Amoor!" (*sic*). She wore red tights and a leopard skin with lace insertions, the whole surmounted by a feather "boa." Hoisted on to a wooden stool she recited a poem in praise of love, after which the orgy began, the scent of the crowd's Wild Woodbines lending additional charm to the *tourbillon de la danse*. To use the word "crude" in connection with the spoken lines is to expose the poverty of the English language. I cite a gem or two.

"Ah, Aspasia, there's a woman for you! What arms, what legs, *what a chest!*"

"Frailty thy name is Aspasia. What man has ever possessed thee *for more than a fortnight at a stretch!*"

And then the lover breaking out in allusion to the infant mewling and puking in the earlier scenes.

"Is that bastard brat, fruit of your sold body, *to stick for ever in my gills?*"

Whereat Shufflebottom's Cross whole-heartedly to applaud. More life-force, you see.

There were other incredible things in connection with the performance. My neighbour in the eighteen-penny stalls spent the intervals and part of the play itself in reading Lessing's *Dramatiurgie* in German. The pianist, tiring of trumpery waltz-tunes, struck into a Brahm's Intermezzo, and once the monstrous Aspasia said in tolerable French "*Que la vie de province est donc triste!*"

La pièce terminée, on descend la rue à présent déserte. L'ivrogne se hâte d'aller prodiguer chez sa chère épouse les tendresses provoquées par le bottled stout. Deux chats, un bobby et des amoureux tardifs, voilà tout ce qui reste debout. Les one-up-and-one-down, les villas, les semi-detached enferment la population honnête et abrutié.

Allons, mon cher, montons le boulevard Croix de Shufflebottom. On a beau chercher les équipages, les belles, les dandys. Le Vicomte Wally de Buckley est depuis longtemps couché. Il a son bellyful du Pale Ale. Il pousse des hoquets, sans doute. Que l'air de sa chambre doit être lourd et sa tête glabre sur l'oreiller horrible à voir. . . . On cherche son latch-key, et on entre chez soi. Dieu ! que la vie de province est donc triste. . . .

§ vii

Letters such as this were unsettling. Insensibly I began to take less interest in things which were not between the covers of books. I drifted further and further from my family and Monica. I think now that I must have neglected her shamefully, although I did from time to time make an effort to keep in touch with her. But in any case my neglect was not worse than her parents'. I have often wondered what fathers and mothers thought about their daughters in those days, and I am reduced to the belief that they did not think about them at all. A little music, a little needlework, a little painting in water colour—"a little" was the measure of the period. At nineteen or thereabouts the half-educated, wholly ignorant future mothers of the race put up their hair and "came out." That is to say they attended some scores of dances and informed some hundreds of young men that they were fond of "a little" music and "liked" concerts. And every year a certain number of them took to themselves indifferently a houseful of furniture, a husband and some eleventh-hour intimations. Those who did not marry? For them the most pathetic

destiny in the world, the destiny of the human being which has not fulfilled its purpose. But Monica did not bother her pretty head about destiny and it is true that very few young men came to Oakwood. Geoffrey had no friends and Claud on his one and only visit quarrelled violently with my uncle on the subject of English Opera, indulgence in which Claud proclaimed to be a vice. Of Ransom, who had been an occasional visitor, we still heard nothing, and the only others who came near us were Westrom and Reinecke. Westrom was tolerated because he was married, Curt because my uncle hoped to glean from him some particulars about Strumbach's affairs. When Monica's education or what passed for it was finished she devoted herself with that quiet determination which she inherited from her father to beautiful and unostentatious work among the poor of the parish, with such quiet effect that even her protégés thought well of her.

In the early part of December Clare told me that she had found evening work—she would not specify its nature—and that henceforth we should only be able to meet on Sundays. Anyone who knows the nature of Sunday evening in the bosom of a provincial family will realise that this meant for me embarkation upon a mean and dexterous campaign of petty lying. I must admit that I managed the hateful business with fair success. Now one of the most formal of family festivals in those days was the annual visit to the Christmas pantomime, and in my uncle's family the rite was well established. A few days before Christmas my aunt at breakfast would call for the morning paper and wonder audibly what the pantomime was going to be like. Geoffrey and I would wonder too, and Monica

would be quite sure that it was going to be a great deal better than the previous year's. After a reasonable amount of badgering my uncle would consent to the principle of a visit and my aunt would stipulate for stalls, fourth row and near the door, in case she should feel faint. After the return from the theatre there would be supper with a glass of champagne to mark the occasion, and my uncle would descant on the merits of the principal boy, my aunt on those of the dresses, and the rest of us on the low comedians. On this year's occasion I sat between my aunt and Monica. After the first bantering exchanges between a gentlemanly devil of uncertain temper and a grandmotherly benefactress-in-chief the drop went up for the first big set—the market-place at Baghdad. And there, in the foremost corner of the scene, with her hair in a pig-tail, her eyes artificially lengthened and her little feet thrust into tiny satin slippers stood my Clare in the likeness of a Chinese boy. I asked my aunt for the glasses and my hand trembled so violently that I could hardly hold them. Monica dropped her glove and as we both bent down she whispered: "Take care, Ned; mother's noticing."

So this was Clare's evening work! As I watched her little figure bend and sway to the common lilt of the music, as I thrilled to her succeeding incarnations, daintiest of horn-pipers, Riviera rose, white pearl of the Pacific, I knew that I was insanely jealous of the coarse contacts of the stage. It was kind of Fate that it should be a Saturday evening and that I had therefore only one sleepless night before my impassioned protest.

"But I can't give it up, Ned dear," she replied.

“It’s thirty shillings a week regular, more than ever I’ve earned before. And I want the money.”

Her eyes had the stubborn look in them which I knew well.

“You shall have two pounds for every week it lasts,” I said bluntly

“I can’t take it, Ned, I can’t indeed, and it’s no use talking.”

I do not contemplate a long account of that winter ; I imagine that there is little that is new in the theme men call infatuation. Enough that the dingy block of stone with its insufficient foyer, its meagre staircase, its photographs of Wilson Barrett as a *décolleté* Hamlet, its faded reminiscences of simpering beauties long in their graves became for me a palace of delight. I learned to bribe doorkeepers and was initiated into many tawdry mysteries. I became involved in trivial rivalries and preposterous jealousies, discovered the infinite niceties of theatrical grading. I will say this for Clare—but what good thing might not I always have said of her?—that she indulged in none of those calculated waywardnesses and artificial comings-on which are the bane of that insincere world. I used to lift her face to the wan light of the door-lamp and never did I see on it trace of the hateful stage-paint. She would scrub her cheek with her handkerchief for proof, and always she put up her mouth as innocently as a child. How pretty I found the little phrases she learnt from the other girls, how quaintly, and how trippingly they came from her lips. Did I insist upon accompanying her beyond the prescribed street-end, “Want will have to be your master,” she would say. Or when I gave her some little thing, “Your kindness

exceeds your beauty." Or if I doubted her affection: "I don't love you, do I? Not till I start!" These little commonnesses, the staple of the chorus girl's wit, did not jar on me then. I used to turn each phrase over lingeringly and find evidence of a dainty, personal wit.

Shortly before Easter the run of the pantomime finished, and on Easter Monday after a thousand difficulties valiantly overcome I succeeded in persuading Clare to make a little excursion to the sea. "For the day," was straightforwardly stipulated and conceded. It was a gorgeous morning. Leader-writers who are accustomed to put a bright face on their readers' poverty could honestly console such of them as had been unable to afford to leave their homes with riotous stories of daffodils coming before the swallow dares, of crocuses blossoming on the window-ledge, with the whole philosophy of inexpensive content. Clare and I sat on the beach with the wind in our faces and the salt on our lips. I suppose there is no simple commonplace to which we did not give expression, though I swear I did not make use of any of the customary and time-honoured wiles. I told her that she was part of the salt wind, the dancing waves, the light-footed sunshine. I remember catching myself up at the hackneyed word and substituting something rarer. I rang the changes on the well-worn theme of Jessica and Lorenzo, and told her of Troilus and Cressida, Dido and Æneas, Antony and Cleopatra and half a score of royal lovers whose meagre passions I compared unfavourably with our own.

"It's a pity about them, isn't it?" said Clare, and for the first time I noticed that the phrase was one which she had used on a hundred occasions. Suddenly

she looked up at me: "Do you think I dance well, Ned?"

"I never thought about your dancing, dear."

"Spender, the agent, wants me to join the troupe for Brussels this summer."

"You're not going, sweetheart."

"It's two-ten a week."

"I don't care if it's twelve-ten," I declared, "you're not going."

"It's a pity about Spender, isn't it?" she rejoined, and then nestled more closely to me. "Remember, Ned, I shall be a responsibility."

I think we both knew that the farce of pretending not to care passionately for each other was at an end. We made a pretence of going to the station. As we watched the train go slowly out: "They'll wonder what has become of you," I said.

"Wonder will have to be their master," she laughed.

Again the summer and again a season of pure delight. Together we endeavoured to keep up the fine strain. Together we sought the simple delights and interests of the provincial town—a poor catalogue indeed. Trim parks, valetudinarians, beds of formal geraniums, children at play in city gardens, little friendships that endure for a summer. Rides on the tops of golden tramcars leading straight into the sunset. Long Saturday afternoons in the Art Gallery. Here I would try to explain why a picture of a tramp with bleeding feet and a mother giving suck under a hedge is not necessarily great art, and failing signally.

I would be unable to tear Clare away from the picture of a grave and bearded doctor who watches the ebbing of a little life. The sad, pale face of an emigrant with his gaze on receding England would set my girl weeping, and the tiny hand of the babe under the mother's shawl move her to a storm. And again I would try to inculcate the principle that pictures must not tell stories. And again I would fail.

"I don't understand a bit," she would say. "You want a thing to *look* beautiful and I want it to *be* beautiful. You want it to look true and I want it to be true. It must be a terrible thing to lose a child even though you can't afford to keep it, and a terrible thing to have no boots and to be cold and hungry. But I suppose you have never been cold and hungry."

And yet she had a fine sense of what I should like to call the tall in order of emotion. There used to hang in the gallery—I do not know whether it hangs there still—the picture of an opulent-bosomed woman watching with filling eyes the drowning of her lover.

"It's a pity about her," Clare would remark and pass contemptuously on.

The truth of the matter was that she was a perfectly honest little savage who had never heard of art-criticism and had no belief in its jurisdiction. She would argue that the painter had no belief in his disconsolate young woman with the eyes like saucers. Hers was a limited experience of life, but it had been a very definite one. She would not go beyond her experience, and she would not take less than experience. In addition to being a savage she was a relentless and

inveterate realist. In vain I tried to explain to her that an exquisite Madonna and Child might be thrown off by an irreligious painter, and the most heart-rending portrayal of poverty emanate from a dilettante who would cut a beggar across the face.

“The pictures would be lies,” said Clare.

“All art is a lie, or at least a fiction,” I was constrained to answer.

“What’s the difference?” she asked.

In the theatre we did not venture much farther afield than the distressful heroes and heroines of melodrama, the tender unrealities of *Sweet Lavender* and the Berlin-wool tragedies of the Kendals. But whereas picture galleries are the recognised meeting-place for clandestine lovers the better theatres are by no means safe. There even Strumbach did not disdain to air his importance, nor his hook-nosed wife her diamonds. I was never sure of not being recognised by some of my uncle’s customers and often Clare and I found ourselves condemned to sit in different parts of the house and exchange signals of intelligence. But there came a never-to-be-forgotten evening when we took our courage in both hands and cowered together in the pit. I had badly wanted my girl to see a great French actress in one of her famous bundles of emotion. The play had fragrance twenty years ago, has fragrance still—the faint, sweet pestilence of the embalmed. The actress was old, and the casket enshrining imperishable art—to put it brutally, her body—was lacquered and gilded to the semblance of life. You could have taken her gowns for ccrements.

“Oh, she’s old!” cried Clare in a burst of disappointment.

And then both play and player took hold of her, as they have taken hold of generations of playgoers. I had coached her in every line of every scene and every word of every line so that she was at least sense-perfect. The uncomplicated psychology of the play was still too complicated for this fiercely honest little soul. The poor troll in the street she could understand, but not the luxurious courtesan with enough to eat. Come to think of it, the sentimental harlot is not easily within the scope of the single-minded. But the minor successes, the clever little tricks with which the play bristles, came easily and triumphantly off. The unrewarded lover sitting all night at the bedside and replenishing the empty coffers, Nichette, that pious little goose, Marguerite's wistful fingering of the bridal veil, her pitiful attempts to walk, the child in her calling to the child at play in the street, all this outmoded sentiment uprooted Clare and dashed her about as in a storm. Even her familiar phrases failed her. That night we walked slowly towards the little slum which was Clare's home. After infinite hesitations and diffidences and plain flat refusals I had made good my right to accompany her as far as the end of the street in which she lived. There I was allowed to watch her as she went up two stone steps that led to a doorway. She would stand framed for a second and wave her hand. As we stood together that night she said: "I wonder, Ned, whether you would sit the fire out for me? That is if I had any fire to sit out."

"Of course, dear," I answered, thinking of the glamour we had left and wondering why life is never as exquisite as its portrayal.

"I wish you meant it," she said, and was gone.

§ viii

And then Geoffrey got married.

The bride was a Miss Pratt, one of the Pratts of Dukinfield, a mild and colourless person peering adoringly at her lover through gold-rimmed glasses. I spent the day trying to reconcile pince-nez with orange-blossom and Geoffrey's puce-coloured trousers and lavender waistcoat with his mauve tie and violet gloves. There was an air of pluming and preening about him which displeased me, and do what I would I could not get out of my head some simile of a burnished goose. I had been pressed into service as best man and my greatest difficulty was to subdue the familiar whistle whilst we waited for the bride. I think the fellow would have piped to execution. At the church I met Rodd and snatched a moment's talk.

"Didn't think you knew 'em," I hazarded.

"I don't, but I get a guinea for 'doing' 'em for a local rag. I'm coming on to the house. Do you think if I'm jolly with the servants they'll give me a glass of champagne?"

My recollection of the day is of a jumble of well-intentioned heartinesses, of chatter about fish-slices and serviette-rings. I have visions of my aunt, dignified; of Monica patient and cheerful in the hullabaloo; of my uncle benevolent, patriarchal and slightly satirical. He was polite to Ruth, the chaste object of his son's choice, and I fancied faintly *goguenard* towards her parents. The pair departed with bicycles on the carriage roof; the bride wearing a toque confectioned in foreign parts, modish and out of place above that startled countenance; the bridegroom swathed in an

Inverness cape and surmounted by a plaid contrivance with ear-flaps.

They were for Paris and were to cycle from Boulogne.

After a considerable amount of eating and drinking a huge party was made up to witness some dull, outrageous farce. On the way back I drove alone with Monica.

"Ned, dear," she said, "there's something I've wanted to tell you for a long time. I haven't liked to write and you see you are hardly ever at home."

"Yes, Monica?"

"It's about Clare, I think she's called. I want to tell you that father knows about her. I think he has found letters or made inquiries."

I said nothing.

"If there's anything I can do to help you, you'll tell me. . . . I hope she's a good girl. I mean I hope she loves you, and that you are not throwing yourself away. . . . Of course I'm just a wee bit disappointed, Ned; you see you haven't confided in me this time. Love is a very wonderful thing and it seems to happen to you too easily. I am sometimes afraid you are not going to be a happy man."

§ ix

A few days later I received the following from Claud:—

I've been and gone and done it!

Hoo-ray!

In this manner.

I have not concealed from you, my dear Ned, that all those delectable morsels of tinned-tongue,

finnan-haddock, Yarmouth bloater and food-stuffs *in which there is no waste*—vital consideration for the pauper—and which have hitherto kept this body and soul together, have been the reward of the vilest occupation *except one* to which man can put his hand. That utterly vilest is to give lessons on the piano. Had I been counsel for the Marquis de Sade I would have alleged that his victims were the confirmed little murderers and murderesses of—whatever beastly sonatas were then in vogue.

Once more I've been and gone and done it.

I stood out for as long as was humanly possible against this basest of *métiers*, but one cannot go on owing fourteen weeks' rent for ever. So yesterday I capitulated. "Shall we fall foul for toys?"

During the morning there came in unto me a person of fashion, Crawley Bridge's latest, or what Paris wore in '70 during the bombardment.

"I understand, young man, that you give music lessons," said this personage.

Oh, she spoke deferentially enough; it's her class which is offensive. After their manner she began to stare at me through eyeglasses fastened on the end of a stick, an insolence which always makes me furious. Whereupon your servant, in the devil's mood that morning, whipped out a magnifying glass about a foot across and spied at her in return.

"That depends, ma'am!" I answered.

"On what, young man?"

"My pleasure at the moment, principally. But also," I added, "on your references, and the degree to which your daughter pleases me, and whether your piano is a good one."

"*Our* piano," replied the astonishing female, "is a grand."

"What make, madam?"

"The make is immaterial. My husband gave two hundred guineas for it."

"Then," I replied, "I will teach your offspring to draw such tones from it as will make you wish she had never been born. Three guineas the course, my good woman, counting thirteen lessons as twelve."

I assure you, Ned, I was not drunk, merely a little above myself. The artist has this revenge over the bourgeois, that he is possessed of an extra dimension, the dimension of impertinence. The bourgeois do not perceive that you are being rude to them any more than people who can be conceived as living on a perfectly flat plane can be conscious of men and trees walking. That woman, for instance, has exactly the same perception of me as a paving-stone has of the sole of my foot. I turned up in the evening at Acacia or Azalea or Auricaria Villas, or whatever its beastly name is. There I was presented to an ill-mannered little brat with two plaits sitting on a stool with her back to what I took to be "the grand," although it looked more like a bier which had been covered with a velvet pall and a few thousand portraits of the deceased. Slowly the child swung round to the piano and slowly licked from the ends of her fingers the remains of a sticky tea. I asked her what studies she had used.

"Them in the green cover," she replied.

And here, Ned, comes the horror of it. In my rage I knocked the little beast headlong into her mother's lap and the stool through the French window.

Of course it means the end of Claud Rodd so far as

Crawley Bridge is concerned. Farewell the Boulevard Croix de Shufflebottom, Numéro Vingt, or any other number.

I'm off to London town.

"Into the dark to fight a giant."

And now, my illustrious de Marsay, *toi qui entretiens des danseuses*, I bid you give heed to this my prayer, though it be not writ on the fair vellum of the Jockey Club and the writer bear for all arms a Beggar couchant on dreams silver, never to be realised. I have confided to my uncle's care—let me say frankly that I have pawned—all those innumerable statues, pictures, snuff-boxes, ivories, rare editions which were our common pride. My remainder fortune consists of the green waistcoat with the red and yellow bees. That was ever too extraordinary a find for the provinces; it may make my name in London.

Would ten pounds . . . ?

Let me lighten your darkness with a last *mot*. Le Marquis Wally de Buckley—*en voilà un qui fera son chemin*—having contracted an alliance with an heiress, one Susanne de Pickersgill, was overheard in the foyer of Crawley's theatre to exclaim: "Marriage is awreet in its way, but it's a poor do for them as thinks life should be all beer and skittles."

Le mot a courru dans la salle.

In notes, please.

Aimez toujours

Votre pauvre

RODD.

§ x

The waning of my affection for Clare dates from the time when I conceived my first book. I have never

been one of those complicated persons who can keep two interests going at once, and with me writing had begun to be the grand passion. Conceal the change as I might—and after a time all concealment becomes perfunctory—I felt sure that Clare noticed it. One day she said suddenly: “Mother wants to see you. She says will you please call on her to-morrow evening. I think you’ll have to, Ned.”

Times without number I had tried to forecast this inevitable meeting, to arrive at some idea of any possible mother of Clare’s, to devise some formula that should carry me through. Steeped as I was in the world of books, I had arrived at a figure of which Madame Cardinal and Mrs Nickleby were the chief components. Or say some loud-voiced, authoritative keeper of a registry office for domestic servants, some dealer in discarded wardrobes, some preposterous incarnation in widow’s weeds, some Gadgett in distress. I had been prepared for the battered charwoman, the faded seamstress, the remnant of better days. But I was not prepared for the entirely self-possessed and dignified figure who to receive me did not move from her chair in the window. By the fading light I could see that she was dressed poorly but with scrupulous neatness, that her hair was grey and her hands small, fine and white. She was very busy with some sewing which, I was quick to note, had no connection with that classic sentimentality, the “little, little things.”

“So you are my daughter’s choice,” the old lady said slowly, motioning me to a chair. And then commandingly: “Sit down, sir, and let me have a look at you.”

It cannot have been a particularly gallant figure

that I made in Clare's grey eyes and before her mother's steady gaze.

"When I say my daughter's choice, Mr Marston, I mean that she chose you to her ultimate unhappiness. You need not be afraid that I shall try to persuade you to do something you have never contemplated. I am not talking about marriage. I do not for one moment imagine that you are a fool or even a sentimentalist except in the selfish sense. You will not run counter to the prejudices of your class. But you must not imagine that I am a fool either. Please do not confound me with my circumstances. Everything you see about me is faded; even my hopes in Clare are faded as my mother's were in me. My daughter knows that I was never married and that in all probability neither will she ever be. Both she and I see this clearly; we are neither of us deceived."

She paused while her hands moved restlessly one over the other.

"Mr Marston, I have sat here in this room sewing, sewing, sewing and waiting for Clare evening after evening for many months, and I know what is in my mind to say to you. I am merely repeating a lesson all these long months have taught. I believe you to be an honest, good-natured fellow, well-intentioned and perhaps not altogether weak. You have been good to my girl in your way and after your education and tradition, and I have no doubt you would always behave handsomely. I believe that is the accepted phrase."

She was silent for a moment and motioned to me to be silent too. I do not know what I could have found to say. After a pause she resumed:

"We are poor people, which is all the more reason

why we should look facts in the face. Clare is running a great risk. Are you prepared to face it? The risk is more serious than the simple one of money, although I do not know what we should do. Neither my daughter nor I would accept money. I do not propose to make a great fuss about your having come into Clare's life; it is useless to talk of what is past. It is when you go out of it that the harm will be complete."

I murmured something about never leaving Clare.

"That is not true," said the old lady. "You mean well but you cannot control the future. You cannot forestall irksomeness any more than any other man. You are not the man you will be. Some day you will tire of Clare and then you will want to be generous and kind and full of delicacy and tact, and this it will be which will break her heart as mine was broken when her father left me. You men don't understand the harm you do. I would have followed her father on my knees to the end of the earth. That he made a hobby of women was nothing to me; I would have waited on the others. . . . I want to prevent altogether or at least to lessen the sadness of the day I see in store for Clare. I will not consent to any prolongation of a fool's paradise. You must clear the situation, sir. I don't ask you to marry my daughter and you will not ask me to receive you on any other terms. Neither will I consent to anything clandestine and underhand. I ask you to break off your relationship. Think seriously, Mr Marston, you are dealing in a human life."

I glanced at Clare, who returned my look with that honest, steady gaze of hers.

“One word more, sir. I think you ought to know that your uncle called on me one day last week and talked about something that he called protection for my daughter. I mistrusted him and denied knowledge of you. He gave me the impression that he has some hold over you. What I have said to you to-night has nothing to do with his visit ; it has been in my mind to speak to you for some time. I think that is all. I beg that you will consider very seriously what I have said to you, and I wish you good-day.”

As I walked home all the stories of witty libertinage which I had ever read came crowding into my brain. I could not rid my mind of all those letters of polite remonstrance which are the literary stock-in-trade of passion wearing thin, the classic expression of the fatigue one feels for the mistress prolonging her worship beyond the acceptable time. I remembered that the French have a word for the situation. *Le collage*. I felt that Clare's mother was right, that I was already, to put it bluntly, tiring. “I will seek some way to leave him,” says the master-leaver in the play, and here the chance of a way out offered, positively offered. I began to square with my honesty, to feel my loyalty, my chivalry even, falling away. I shall have the Westroms and all decent people against me. I had him against me at the time although I allowed him to see little of the affair. But then the Westroms have never known insanity. They love with a reasonable ardour and to a responsible end. “You'll have to buy fire-irons and it's no end of a lark !”

A poor burking of the issue. I felt that I had no case, or at least no avowable one, for I knew that

there is no code which permits a man to desert a girl he has wronged merely because he has outgrown her. I was conscious of having outgrown Clare, of a more engrossing interest in myself and my work, and I was an easy prey to the æsthetic fallacy of the period, the amorality of the artist. This fallacy may be summed up in the statement that the creation of great works of art frees the creator from moral responsibility, that the writer of fine books is immune from the common obligations. It is an amazing theory. Still more amazing the fact that a whole school of great writers should have flourished at so damnable an instigation. Cocasse, cocasse !

I do not admit that I began consciously to plan the way to leave Clare, but rather that my thoughts took to straying in the direction of a considered possibility. I began to see less of her, less and still less.

§ xi

Here let me record the most grotesque incident in Reuben Aekroyd's career, his sudden flight into municipal politics. I could never guess the motive, can only suppose vanity. My uncle stood for the Shufflebottom Cross Ward at Crawley Bridge in the twofold interest of the artisan and the Conservative party, a dexterous combination which gave his prevaricatory genius full scope. Holding in his inmost soul that the working man was unfit to live, he proclaimed that he would do well in his own interest to submit to government by his betters. Perhaps this is a little hard. Taking a more favourable view, Reuben held that the worker has the right to live,

but only in the sphere for which he is fitted or to which "it has pleased God" to call him. From which we deduce

XVI

The working man's recognition of his sphere and his contentment therein are the foundation and bulwark of society.

Among my uncle's public promises was one to the effect that if the working man would do his clear duty in the matter of the vote, he, Reuben, engaged himself to make him "fitter for the battle"—*i.e.* fitter to make more money for his employer. In return I have no doubt that my uncle promised himself to bury the poor fellow handsomely in the end; in the interim to acknowledge his touched forelock with the utmost of his affability. In other words, government by graciousness and doles.

My uncle's opponent, Robert Inskip, was a mild, insignificant little Socialist with a fussy, fretful manner, rusty clothes and steel spectacles held together with blobs of sealing-wax. His opinions were of the extremest and most violent order, inclining to the view that if anything Jack is a trifle better than his master. An inconsiderable opponent, the sting of whose opposition lay in the fact that he was Reuben's chief salesman. Inskip had been the first in the field and had declined to give way on his master's announcing that it was his pleasure to stand.

"It will be a tough fight and a near thing," had been his way of refusing to withdraw.

I have before me my uncle's election address, which I take to be a model of suave blasphemy. Here it is.

To the electors of

SHUFFLEBOTTOM CROSS

GENTLEMEN,

On November 1st you will be called upon to elect a representative to the town council. I have been honoured by a request to become a candidate and have pleasure in offering such poor service and ability as a Higher Power has granted me.

I trust that the confidence which I have long enjoyed as the head of a large industrial concern in your midst may form the basis of a wider trust and a larger faith.

In the event of my election I shall hope to take my share in the arduous labours and responsibilities of the town's Watch Committee, upon whose deliberations and decisions so much of the safety and comfort of a large community necessarily depends. The constant support which it has been my privilege to accord to our local Vigilance Society should be a sufficient guarantee of the faith which is in me as to the value of prohibitory measures.

I shall support all efforts to make the amenities of life in our town as healthful and enjoyable as possible. I shall advocate the establishment of a Municipal Bowling Green.

If you do me the honour to elect me as your representative I shall strive for the public attainment of those ideals which have long been the affair of my private prayer and solicitude. Amongst these ideals are

Cheaper and Better Housing
Cheaper and Improved Tramway Service
Cheaper and Improved Lighting
A Higher Responsibility in Public Affairs
and
Lower Rates.

May God direct your votes !

Yours faithfully

REUBEN ACKROYD.

Little Inskip's proclamation based on the Equal Rights of Man was a grim and violent effusion largely made up of scolding but ending with the assurance that human woe would vanish on the return of Robert Inskip to the Crawley Bridge Council. It is unnecessary to record the ebb and flow of the contest, the pathetic fallacies of one combatant, the resounding pomposities of the other. If Reuben had said simply "Vote for me. I am the better man," I should have respected him. If Inskip had retaliated "I stand for the better principle," I should have applauded him. By far the most effective contribution to the debate was the Socialist cartoon "By the sweat of their brow shall Reuben eat bread."

To me the introduction of politics into a city's domestic economy has always been the height of absurdity. So long as streets are well lighted and cleanly swept, sewage unostentatiously removed, traffic controlled, pickpockets and burglars reasonably restrained ; so long as houses of public refreshment are kept open beyond a child's bed-time ; so long as trams run and letters are delivered, so long do I care nothing

at all whether the overseers are Liberal or Conservative, Turk or Mormon, Cæsars, Cannibals or Trojan Greeks.

After a time it seemed possible that the election might go against my uncle. No man can grind the faces of his workpeople for thirty years without producing an effect on the mind of even so notoriously stupid a person as an elector. And then Reuben committed one of those acts of madness from which no self-willed man is immune. A week before the election he summoned Inskip to appear before him in his private office, in the presence of Geoffrey and myself.

"Mr Inskip," he began pleasantly, "I wish to refresh my memory. What are your emoluments?"

"Salary four pounds a week. Commission comes to another four."

"And that commission is payable when?"

"At the end of the year."

"Mr Inskip," said my uncle, gravely unfolding a legal-looking document, "I have here a copy of our agreement. I see that it stipulates that if at the conclusion of the year you find yourself unable to make a fresh engagement with us on such terms as may be agreeable to both parties you are to forfeit whatever commission is due to you."

"Does it say that?" said Inskip, his face growing suddenly white.

"It does. I will read you the text." And my uncle, for a space of five minutes by the clock, read in portentous tones a mass of legal-sounding jargon. Folding up the paper he went on: "Well, sir, I find that my conscience will not allow me to retain in my employ a man whose beliefs are subversive of the very foundations of morality. Mr Inskip, I have to notify you that if

you persist in your immoral campaign I have the intention of offering you such terms for your next year's engagement as will probably not suit you."

"And if I decline them?"

"Then obviously, according to our agreement, the commission which would otherwise become due to you at the end of next month is forfeit."

My temples began to beat and Geoffrey stopped whistling.

"So you would blackmail me," said Inskip slowly. "You know I am a poor man." It was obvious that he was trying to grasp the full extent of my uncle's baseness.

"Listen to me, Mr Inskip," said Reuben. "I am indifferent on the personal count as to which of us wins this election, but I cannot make distinction between public and private morality. I have lived too long to care for personal victories or defeats. I am above petty consideration."

"It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!" I whispered.

"I regard your views as a menace to public safety. I am myself no Socialist, and view with horror all manifestations of that spirit. Socialism saps and undermines; it is the negation of individual effort, of the obligation to deal with one's talent according to the means the Donor of all talents has granted us. That it is immoral to reap where others have sown should be patent to the meanest intelligence. I feel that I am morally bound—and I consult no man's conscience but my own—to take such steps as may be open to me to induce you to relinquish the expression of these views. Should you persist in them I warn you that I shall not feel justified in renewing at the end of the year those

relations which have hitherto existed so pleasantly between us. Should you stand down I think that perhaps we might see our way to"—here he hesitated—"to some not inconsiderable modification of terms which might not be disagreeable to you. This is tentative; I make no promise."

In suspense I waited for Inskip's reply. His hands were clenched and his mouth tremulous.

"Suppose that at the meeting to-night——" he began.

Reuben cut him short.

"You won't repeat a word; and you know you won't. You can stir up a lot of virtuous indignation, of course. But virtuous indignation is poor nourishment for a middle-aged man with an ailing wife and half-a-dozen children. It's my windows against your livelihood. Who's going to keep you and them afterwards? Who's going to take you on if ever you leave me? You're past your best and you've no connection that you can remove. Come, Mr Inskip, take a sensible view. I don't threaten, and I don't bribe. I merely propose another hundred a year in recognition of your long and valued services."

And then little Inskip had the one supreme gesture of his meagre life, and for one moment trod the mountain tops of liberty. For one instant of time master of his soul, never again to be free of his slave's fetters. He strode up to Reuben Aekroyd and with his left hand took him by the beard. My uncle made no effort to fend him off.

Geoffrey moved towards intervention and I threw my arms around him.

"Leave them," I said. "It's man to man."

“ You are a beast,” said Inskip slowly, “ a bloated, treacherous beast. I have known you for forty years and I have always known you for what you are. There is not a starved man nor half-fed child in your employ who does not wish you dead a thousand times a day. You are a dog, a treacherous cur, and if I had neither wife nor children I would kill you with my hands.”

“ Amen,” I said under my breath.

“ Help me, Geoffrey,” the old man gasped, clawing at the frail arm which held him. I clung the more tightly.

“ Silence, you hound of hell,” went on the little man, shaking his victim with all the fury of impotence. “ It’s you and your kind who make Socialists. It’s you and your kind who make a working man’s life what it is. It’s you who are responsible for fevers and consumptions, disease and death. And what good has it done you ? You’ve thrown away loyalty and affection and respect, and all you’ve got is hate and every decent man’s contempt. But I’ve got to be quick ; I can’t keep this up for long. I’m a broken man. Here’s my answer.”

And with that he flung his clenched fist full into the face of Reuben Ackroyd, philanthropist and man of business. I released Geoffrey. My passionate hero, his glory quite departed, had shrunk to his normal significance and stood in the middle of the room, his face buried in his hands. By his shoulders I could see that he was sobbing.

I have no recollection of how the principal actors managed their exits from the scene. The following day Inskip withdrew his candidature and to the end of his

life was my uncle's whipped dog. It is true that the extra hundred a year was a God-send to him.

§ xii

On the morning of my twenty-fifth birthday I found a letter in my uncle's handwriting addressed to me at the office. It ran :

MR EDWARD MARSTON,—My partner and myself will be obliged if you will attend in the private office at eleven o'clock in the forenoon of to-morrow, Tuesday. Yours faithfully,

REUBEN ACKROYD.

My uncle's trick of conveying the simplest communication by letter and of alluding to his son as "my partner" used to annoy me intensely. It annoys me still.

Eleven o'clock on the following day saw me ushered into the holy of holies. There I found Reuben going through his letters and Geoffrey lounging by the window whistling softly and turning over the pages of an old and tattered manual *The Horse, The Friend of Man*, which, incredibly, had adorned the window-sill for thirty years. I had never before seen anybody open it and I have never discovered how it came to be part of the properties of a cotton-manufacturer's sanctum. I was wool-gathering in this profitless way when I was recalled by a cough from my uncle and the note of unusual circumstance which he threw into a preliminary

"May I beg your attention, Edward?"

"My dear uncle," I replied, "I am not a public meeting."

“As it is probable,” he went on without taking notice of what I am afraid was flippancy, “as it is probable that this will be the last time on which I shall have the privilege of addressing you on matters of business, I must beg that you will listen to me closely. As you know, your father on his death left a sum of money which was to stand in your name on the books of the firm until such time as you should have completed your twenty-fifth year.”

I nodded.

“That sum of money amounted to twelve thousand eight hundred and some odd pounds. Out of the interest on that amount two hundred pounds a year was to be paid to me for your maintenance, the balance to be added to your capital.”

I nodded again.

“I am pleased to tell you that the sums I have expended on your behalf have never in any one year exceeded the two hundred pounds and have occasionally fallen below that figure. I have endeavoured in my calculations to be both just to you and fair to myself. I make out that there is an amount owing to you on maintenance account, including interest, of three hundred and twenty-seven pounds odd. I hold this amount together with your principal at your disposal—some seventeen thousand four hundred pounds in all.”

“It is very kind of you,” I began.

“It is not a matter of kindness but of common probity. We have few sentiments in common. To-day sees the end of our business relations. I regret that I cannot consent to admit you to partnership with your cousin Geoffrey and myself. That you

have forfeited what would have been your right is due entirely to your own waywardness and folly."

"To the devil with his prosy oratory," and "At least I shall have my liberty" are all that I remember thinking as I stood staring steadily at my uncle's blandly-beaming spectacles.

"Your father on his death-bed entered into a compact with me whereby you were to devote yourself to the best interests of the firm of Ackroyd and Marston until you should attain the age of twenty-five. After which and subject to your having strictly observed certain conditions of that compact you were to be admitted to partnership in that firm."

He began playing with a legal-looking document.

"I have to declare that you have vitiated this contract in its most vital essentials. You have made use of your Socialistic views to oppose the best interests of the firm; you have thwarted the firm's interests at every turn; you have abused your position to prejudice your cousin Geoffrey and myself with our manufacturers, our customers, and our employees. He that has not been with us has been against us."

Astounding old rogue! Was there no limit to his blasphemy?

"There is one other condition to which your right of partnership has always been subject and that is the strict observance of the simple moralities. On your father's death I read over to you the deed to which he and I had put our hands, and of which you were provided with a copy. You must therefore be presumed to have had cognisance of its conditions. I think you will not deny that your moral conduct has been and is at the present time such as must prejudice

in the highest degree the interests of the firm you serve. I presume you will not deny that you have a mistress who is a public dancer and to whose upkeep you contribute. I am advised by my lawyers that I am under no obligation to admit you to partnership, and I will not deny that here my interest and my conscience are one. My partner and I are perfectly well able to dispense with the use of your small capital and we consider your further services to be both useless to the firm and dangerous. I may inform you that the partnership you have forfeited would have been worth the greater part of two thousand a year—including interest on capital say two thousand five hundred a year. Whether this is too high a price to pay for the course of conduct you have chosen to pursue it is not for me to decide. My partner and I have arranged to admit Mr Temple in your place at a share which is advantageous to him and to ourselves. I have the less compunction at arriving at this decision inasmuch as with prudent investment you still possess seven hundred a year. That amount will doubtless permit you to play the Socialist and the blackguard wheresoever you will, but at least not in partnership with me or my son."

"Shut the door upon him and let him play the fool nowhere but in's own house," I whispered softly.

"I have a cheque at your disposal," said Reuben.

I have never known what it is to hesitate at a crisis.

"My dear uncle," I said, "let me compliment you on your style. You have the embezzler's sense of legal nicety. Give me my principal and let me go."

For all answer he handed me an envelope containing a cheque for the total amount of my fortune.

And thus I was never a partner in the firm of Ackroyd and Marston.

The following morning brought me another letter. It was from Clare and was very short.

MY DEAR, DEAR NED (she wrote),—I know that to-day is the day of your partnership and that you are a rich man. But I know also that you are tired of me and I cannot bear the thought that I shall soon be no more than a drag and encumbrance upon you. I know that you would be generous, but I do not want generosity either for myself or for the child you will never know. I had great difficulty in making mother promise not to tell you about that. The day you came to see her was the day when I put you to the touch. I was determined that if I could not keep you out of affection I would never try to hold you out of pity. And as the child grew in me I felt your love diminish . . . and then it became impossible to tell you.

We have decided that it is best that we should go away. When you get this we shall have already gone ; we intend to lose ourselves in some small town where you will never find us. For your comfort let me tell you that I have some savings and that we are in no immediate danger of want. I began to put a little aside when first you forgot my birthday, and I have enough to carry us through until my looks come back again. Spender will always find me a place in one of his companies, he says for as long as I can dance, but he means for as long as I remain pretty.

I am not going to worry you, Ned, with useless reproaches. I daresay I was not clever enough to

keep you. God knows that I tried hard enough, but trying is no good. Perhaps nothing is any good when the fancy is past. I thought that if I loved you and was true to you and had no thought for anybody else but you, you would be satisfied. I know now that men are not like that, or at least that my man was not like that. I would willingly have laid down my life for you.

Good-bye, Ned, and God bless you. You were good to me according to your lights.

I never saw Clare again, nor set eyes upon my son until he was grown to manhood.

§ xiii

I suppose I shall have the charge of callousness to face. I know that it would be pretty and effective if I could here recount a long and hopeless search, a year or two's quest for Clare. Let me be at least fair to myself—I had been suddenly set free from an irksome business with possession of what was for me a fortune, had newly-found urgency and leisure to write. I think I felt that a charge of baseness would lie, and although I did not plead the books I was to write in mitigation at least they took on some redemptive colouring. Not "my work is the excuse," but "my work shall be the amends." I had some awkward moments when I tried to reconcile with my treachery our youthful theoretical stuff, the carrying on of the race, Nature's law, and all the grandiloquent rest of it. I could better have faced a frank, illicit union with open recognition of the consequences than this shirking

of responsibility. "You are my immortality," my father had written, and "Remember that I am part of you for ever and that when you too are a father you will be part of your son for ever." But I confess that I did not worry very greatly over this. I was too young and too deeply engrossed in creating my own immortality.

And so I settled down to my writing. In three years of hard toil I produced two novels with the scant success I have already related. I suppose that during this time I ate a certain number of meals, slept a certain number of hours, had certain minor indispositions, took occasional holidays. I saw nothing of my uncle and little of Monica. My friends were scattered, Westrom faithful to Crawley Bridge which I never again visited, Reinecke ransacking South America for more plunder for Strumbach, Claud in London, Ransom heaven knows where. I stuck to Manchester for a time through sheer timidity, and can honestly say that the only events which befell me were occasional letters from my friends. Here is the one which Westrom wrote on the appearance of my second novel :

. . . It's a fine attempt, anyhow. Don't worry about sales. I see that the reviews are good, but reviews have no more relation to sales than sales have to merit. It is possible to have "notices" such as Milton might have beamed over and yet sell no copies at all. It depends almost entirely on your publisher's methods being vulgar enough and whether his salesmen have the right sort of boots. If I were to write a novel I should have it given out that the MS. had been found in the coffin of an exhumed Duke, or

any other balderdash. The worst of it is that you can never be sure what kind of bait the public is in the mood to swallow, and it is a waste of good vulgarity to be vulgar without succeeding.

Will you forgive a word of advice? Beware of the parish of sex. You advanced fellows are so thunderingly behind the times with what you would call your passionate preoccupations. (I dislike most of your jargon.) I am for an honest betrayal as much as any man and can cry like a good 'un over Hetty Sorrel and Jeanie Deans. But then I'm a civilised cove and not a satyr.

It's wiser being good than bad ;
It's safer being meek than fierce ;
It's fitter being sane than mad, etc., etc.

Why not a novel in which goodness is made interesting? You will say that it can't be done; all the more reason for trying. Muscular Christians are not necessarily fools, you know. And what shall it avail a writer if he possess all the *mots justes* and have not charity towards his fellow-creatures? On a technical point, don't crowd your good things too closely. Give our dull wits elbow-room. When your apparently trivial novelist tells you that the Lady Ethelberta poured herself out another cup of tea and took another piece of toast, he is merely giving the reader time to take in that last fine sally of her lover's. Verbal sword-play must not be so fast that you cannot see the fencing. Have you never noticed that even the best actresses are floored by the suddenness of Beatrice's "Kill Claudio!" After Benedick's "Come, bid me do anything for thee," they find it pays to strike an attitude and exclaim "Anything?" or "Just repeat that remark, will

you?" and then, having tipped the wink to the spectator who was eating chocolates or fiddling with his programme and generally not paying attention, they proceed to the launching of the tremendous line. Remember that you can't prevent the reader from putting your book down just in time to miss your best effect and taking it up again a page later. And that whilst most readers are fools this is not true of all, any more than that all authors are as Godlike as you would make them out to be.

Of home news, little. My wife is in bed with a cold, and the servant is in high dudgeon at not having a cold too. Consequently I am off upstairs to give Rupert his bath and Gerald his pobs. You probably object to the humdrum of this. When will you learn that it is provincial and suburban and parochial, and all three at once, to jeer at the normal merely because it *is* normal. We must all cultivate our back gardens, though to do this it is not essential that we should have sown the front lawn with wild oats.

Then this from Reinecke.

I am arrived in Paraguay via Hamburg, which is after all the Fatherland. It is not right that a good German should abandon his mother-expressions. Of course it was necessary for me who have not been in Germany since some years to journey from Coblenz to Bingen on the bosom of our so-beautiful river. The little villages each with four houses and sixteen beer-gardens are too lovely. But how did I feel the benefit of my English training when I accompanied a party of my countrymen to visit that big, ugly *kemach*, the Emperor's Castle! The ceilings are painted red,

blue and yellow, the carpets are of purple and the upholstery of green. The walls are decorated with constipated art works by German professors with frames of solid gold. Passing the Lorelei, that side of the boat which was nearest to it was weighed down by the sudden rush of Fatherlanders. Fat men and fatter women, all with huge sausages in the mouth and mugs of beer and bottles of Rhine-wine in the hand were *ach-ing* and *wunderschön-ing* in the most ludicrous manner. To think that if I had not been in England I should make the same noises! Whilst I was in Germany I noticed that my eyes bulged already and I began to want spectacles.

I am now the perfect commercial traveller. Is it interesting to you to learn that I have to-day sold 50,000 kilos cardboard? It is so very disagreeable to act as *commis-voyageur*, to be forced to think all day business, so that you cannot listen any more to the "sweet unheard melodies" of your soul. I am compensating for this disagreeable trade with an affection for a charming little South American girl. That is to say I am puzzling how to get rid of her. I am so easily tired of women. May they be as lovely as possible, they never reach the ideal.

Shall I bore you with my scenery descriptions? You cannot imagine the beauty of this old river where hundred and hundred years ago lived the Indians in the beautiful forests at his borders. I walk by his side in the evening and read one Spanish book, one very clever German book about Goethe—as all must be clever which is connected with Goethe—and some Nietzsche, at times no reasonable stuff. One must see to understand the beauty of this sunset; the

sentimentality almost German of this night, when the parting sun lays his last rays on the trees as a token of the friendship of centuries. Happy is he who can hold aloof from his real life and understand the language of flowers and of nature. But I will not describe further. *Reisebriefe* always bore.

Sometimes I think I will never be worth much interest. I do not think now that you will ever see "Curt Reinecke Op.100" on the cover of some big symphony or opera. I can think beautiful things but I cannot invent them. They are underneath 50,000 kilos cardboard! I do not want to be the Strumbach of Hamburg, but it is very difficult not to succeed in business when one is a Jew. Is this mad? One has to be mad occasionally. I notice that happiness comes often from no reason. Recently when I was one day on a ship I was happy. There were a lot of *kemach* on board, and some mannerless Germans. Also two English people, so proud that if they were dying no one would dare to speak with them. Then there were a lot of emigrants. One woman with a baby at her breast was eating soup of macaroni, and while she was eating the baby was sucking hard. One of the macaronis fell on her bosom and she left it there and continued her dinner. I wondered whether she was happy. . . .

Yesterday I went to the opera and heard the *Maestri Cantori* by *Ricardo Wagner*!! That is enough to make happy for a year, both the opéra and the way they call it here.

Do not make a sour face at this long letter. Write soon to my honourable person.

And at length news came from Ransom.

1000 CORNEILLE AVENUE, CHICAGO.

You will be surprised, my dear Marston, to hear from me after all this time. But perhaps you have guessed that I was determined not to write until I had achieved some sort of success. And I have achieved it; at least I have a wife, a flat, and money in the bank. It has not been easy.

I got here in three stages. First, London. After infinite difficulty I managed to get on to the staff of the advertising department of a respectable Tory journal. There when I was not occupied in bag-carrying, cab-fetching or running errands for the senior employees I was permitted to tinker up the pictures of dapper little gentlemen in frock-coats demonstrating to elegant *mondaines* the superiority of gas-fires over electricity, or vice versa. They say Millais or some other English painter was never so happy as when he was putting the high lights on to a pair of patent leathers. I soon tired of it, and went the round of the publishers in search of illustrative work. You know, I *can* do that; if I don't interpret too slavishly, at least I don't get in the author's way. I pestered these gentlemen with all the assiduity of broken-down ladies keeping body and soul together on out-of-date encyclopædias and discarded atlases. Most publishers refused to see me; those who did gave me advice. Streidlitz said: "Do me a series of fifty illustrations to— here he hummed and haa'd—Shakespeare, and I'll have a look at 'em." Dobie and Dyson said: "Do us a dozen or so up-to-date sketches for Dickens, something smart and slick, and we'll consider." I asked whether they wouldn't like to see my "idea of a cathedral," whereupon they fired me out. Not one of them

would so much as look at the drawings which I *had* done.

Fools !

“High adventure” is all rubbish. I wanted work.

And then I got a job, chair-designing, which took me to Brussels, but it didn't last long. There *are* only seven shapes of chairs. It was here that I came in for a fine bit of fun. I put in a week's hard drawing at the Academy—from the life—so as to be able to compete for admission. I learned one thing and one thing only during those absurd seven days, which was that whilst the students looked like revolutionaries and anarchists and had the appropriate unwashed manners, they were in reality mild, oh, so unutterably, incalculably mild ! I did not unearth a talent or a vice among the lot. They followed the pencil of a Belgian professor with a Scotch accent—he had been a drawing-master in Glasgow—with about as much intelligence as performing seals follow the stick. They followed with their noses and the same silly air as a seal. There's something in hypnotism ; the professor called it tradition. You may rest assured that I made a drawing after my own heart, a sprawling, ill-mannered, aggressively anti-academic thing. They slammed the door in my face. . . .

By this time I had, of course, got to the end of my money. A dozen times I wrote to people in England and a dozen times I tore the letter up. I couldn't beg, I had no acquaintances to borrow from, and I wasn't clever enough to steal.

So I decided to “shake the dust,” etc. and turn my back on Europe.

Ye gentlemen of England that stay at home at ease,

what a funny lot you are ! Saturday afternoons in the bosom of your families, household wit on the links. I wonder whether I shall ever return to it all again.

In this broad, simple, Whitmanesque country I can at least breathe. I've been able to get work and I've been well paid for it. What does it matter if it's only designing palaces for millionaires ? I say "designing." Of course I'm fantastically ignorant of strains and stresses, thrusts and pulls. They have rude mechanical fellows to see that the erections don't tumble down ; my job is the façade which I titivate according to the customer's taste and fancy. I can do you as smart a bit of Gothic or *chic* Byzantine as you could wish to set eyes on. The work is not really as bad as it sounds ; and in any case I get immense fun out of the clients. In Manchester I had to choose between Strumbach and honesty, in London between bag-carrying and the streets. The worst of it was that my masters wouldn't even pick my brains. I would have devilled for them loyally and without recognition ; the knowledge that my brains were not quite thrown away would have contented me. But they knew better. You may say my work out here is low. Admitted, but better the store than the gutter. The heroic disposition doesn't suffice ; you must be able to go without meals as well.

In the meantime I am amused by America and the Americans. They are, by the way, thunderingly untrue to Henry James.

I have kept this from Rodd till the last.

Well, my play is launched and it's going fine. It's a *succès de scandale* and a monecy-maker to boot.

It's all about a young woman who wants to be a mother but can't be bothered with a husband—the *milieu*, the Yorkshire colliery districts. I've got an actress for the London production with the most perfect Houndsditch accent—you must always give the Cockney something he can understand. I am fitting out half-a-dozen touring companies for the provinces and shall of course vary the dialect with the coal-seam. There's nothing Swansea likes better than holding up its hands at Barnsley and vice versa. Sticking your nose into other people's dirty linen is an amusing game. . . . I badly want the play to be a success for the sake of those I shall be allowed to write afterwards. Once make your mark and the public will take anything from you, even good work. But they're as shy as trout; you've got to tickle 'em.

I need hardly tell you that I had a pretty stiff time at the start. There's an old saying that there's plenty of room at the top; I would add that it is of little use having the upper-story genius unless you have the ground-floor talent as well. When I came up to London I was prepared to turn out a column on Greek tragedy which old Pater would not have jibbed at, but I soon found that I was no good at the smart and pithy "par." It took me a year to learn that what newspapers want is not criticism but paragraphs, and now I'll undertake to be as snappy as the Sermon on the Mount. Did you know it was I who discovered Maeterlinck? You only knew him as a poet; I found out he was fond of automobiles and slipped over to Brussels to interview him. "Motorist and Mystic!" How's that for a headline? It makes me wonder what has become of our old *kemach* album.

I began my apprenticeship to the trade of scribbling by doing some fifty articles on the theatre for one of those provincial newspapers run in the interests of a stable, a kennel, and the Conservative party. Fifty columns of my best blood and brains, or what was left of them after some three hours of a London first night in a corner where you can't hear and behind a pillar where you can't see. Ten thousand lines I "contributed"—at least forty pounds' worth at the rate for murders and street accidents. You'll never guess what they sent me. *Seven pounds*, my dear, and said it was more than they originally intended owing to the "superior quality of the stuff." The cheque came on Christmas Eve. Hard up though I was, I gave it to a cabby to buy a new coat and wrote and told 'em so.

"Quixotic beggar, Rodd," said superb Cræsus, when he got my letter, or so his manager told me. And now I've just turned him down at a fiver a column!

Then I did a turn at advertising work. "Pillsbury's Pastilles sweeten the Breath and make Conversation a Pleasure" was *my* find. There is no complaint however monstrous and ludicrous for which I have not invented a rhyming remedy. I can tease you to smile with my cure for constipation and charm you to a tear on the subject of superfluous hair. Vendors of patent medicines have come to me boggling at the half-heartedness of their advisers. Give me the daggers, I would reply, and carve them a seller out of atrocity's living rock.

For a time I earned a living playing the piano at "At Homes." They used to give me a pound a night, guineas when a white tie was *de rigueur*. I have

disguised myself as a Hungarian and as a Pole, a Kaffir and a Chinaman, even on occasion as a gentleman. I have worn plush and powdered my hair. There is in point of fact no indignity to which I have not submitted. I have learned to look more leniently on those poor drabs who wear tawdry finery and dye their hair. (By the way I've got an idea for a story—all about a harlot who keeps her intellectual privacy and talks *down* to her lovers.) I remember one over-bosomed duchess asking if I could play *Venus on the Hill*. I was surprised, but said I could and began to kick up the very deuce of a shindy with *my* version of the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser*, which really *is* a version, let me tell you! After about five minutes the poor beldam said she had had enough of the introduction and could the waltz begin. It turned out that *Venus on the Hill* is something to dance to. There is extraordinarily little difference between Park Lane and Shufflebottom's Cross.

I have just come from a dress rehearsal at the Greater England Theatre where Lustgarten is giving what he calls "A Christmas Allegory of Good-will." It is not to be called a pantomime although the title, *The Wings of a Dove*, has given the old boy's scenic genius all the scope it wants. There's a bird in it, a very ordinary pigeon by the way, procured from some villainous cut-throat fancier. The *clou* of the evening is to be the flight of poor Fan from the stage to its cote in the gallery—the bird consenting of course. The deputy-sub-assistant-stage-manager who has been rehearsing the flight for ten hours a day went down on his knees this afternoon imploring the bird to disclose its intentions as to to-morrow. To-day it refused

to budge an inch. If it sulks "on the night" bang goes three hundred a year or whatever it is the poor rehearsal gets. If the flight is achieved then Lustgarten himself, astute old monkey, will come forward and "take the call." He'll kiss the bird of course, and you'll all grovel.

I'm by way of being in his confidence since I began to "influence taste," as he says. Influence the receipts is what he means. You know it's not safe for even the best people to make up their minds about a play until they've seen what I've got to say about it. Lustgarten tells me that after "the season of good-will" he's going to do *Chopin, or The Story of an Ungrateful Mistress*. His idea is to walk about the stage trying to look consumptive and jotting down inspiration in a penny notebook, what time the orchestra plays snatches of that awful Funeral March. Then there are to be some nineteen women—to represent the Nocturnes. I had to look up Grove to satisfy him that there *are* nineteen and not six or forty-five; he's a stickler for accuracy, you know. Then these nineteen wenches—always presuming there are nineteen—are to step out of frames and dance round him while he dreams. I believe he intends to have a sleep-walking scene in which he fumbles at the keys whilst that hackneyed old thing in E flat is played "off." *Doesn't* the old boy know his public? Ransom's Strumbach all over again.

The most amusing thing about the theatre is its underworld, and I'm not sure that it isn't instructive as well. I often spend an hour in a low bar opposite the stage-door of the Greater England. There you see the world old Westrom had no inkling of and wanted to make allowances for—the world of stage hands,

doorkeepers, call-boys, seedy out-of-work actors, hangers-on, touts, all the hundred and one extraordinary creatures that hover on the edge of the stage. There you hear preposterous stories of old Lustgarten in that wonderful accent which is half East End clothier and half sham Italian voice-producer. There you can surprise some ethereal creature's dresser in search of stout, and young Apollo turned Beau Brocade nibbling a sandwich. Then all that half-world of uncertain definition, unscrupulous and suspect, without function or purpose; that half-world which is all generosity, good-nature, wit and drift, hopeless, helpless drift.

The other evening I went to supper at old Ravenscourt's. I don't suppose you have ever heard of him; he is reputed to have been a famous juvenile lead in the early fifties. The critics of the period speak of him as a young Adonis of singular beauty and a very promising actor. He is both still! Do you remember Maupassant's story of the young man of ninety who danced at the public balls? Ravenscourt is like that. There is an atmosphere about him of nard and aloes, or whatever it is embalmers use. He introduced me to a Miss Smithers—who the deuce is she?—and talked a lot about her performances of *Medea* and *Electra* in ancient Greek. Such a mistake not to give these bagatelles in modern French, don't you think? So I played them what I could remember of Strauss's *Electra*. Ravenscourt was terrible to see. Fresh enough at the beginning, he decayed visibly as the evening wore on. He sat on a sofa with one leg drawn up underneath him—rather a creaky performance—and wept and wrung his hands like a girl. "I can't bear it," he cried, "I can't bear it." and the tears ran down

his raddled old cheeks. It was one of the most grotesque and pitiful sights imaginable.

But the most extraordinary thing about London is its fashionable women, whom I abhor almost as much as I do their dogs. Last night I had to listen throughout the whole of dinner to prattle about Chérie's artlessness and Toto's taking ways. It appears that two of these horrid little beasts had had their engagement announced in the Society papers and that the wedding had been a very smart affair. I had to hear how the bridegroom wore a priceless confection in *rose-thé*, with ruchings of *vieil or*, and a bracelet round each foot; how the bride was attired in maidish satin with sprigs of orange-flower. She wore no other ornament, sighed her romantic owner. I asked her whether at the end of the tomfoolery she left them *enfin seuls*. But these creatures are impervious. . . .

It was this letter which brought me to London.

I suppose the years I spent there were sheer waste. At least they gave me nothing better than my last three unsuccessful novels and the great and glorious *Mr Pig-Pig!* over the mysterious authorship of which all London went crazy for a season.

I have nothing further to record until the whole of England rises to her great occasion. Sixteen years like an evening gone, as the old hymn says.

CHAPTER V

§ i

ALL the world is in agreement that you cannot indict a nation ; it is perhaps not so obvious that you cannot sympathise with one. Not a year but a thousand savages—that is races whose civilisation is not ours—commit suicide upon the graves of their ancestors—pleasing matter for a page in your traveller's notebook. The Congo native waves his tragic stumps—we debate whether to sell our rubber shares. And there is this matter of Belgium. All that I knew of Belgium towards the beginning of August 1914 might have been summed up in a couple of poets, a hearsay cathedral, a well-worn tag as to cock-pits and battle-grounds and the recollection that it was before the walls of Namur that my Uncle Toby received his wound. Was it for this handful of knowledge that I as an Englishman was passionately eager to go to war? I cannot think so. Statesmen have invented the "idea" of patriotism as a defence against national indifference, the knightly attitude towards little nations as a protection against national selfishness. We are such children that the mere official record of the martyrdom of old men and babes leaves us cold whilst we may be moved to tears with the same recital from the stage, some tawdry troll draped in red, yellow and black sending us cheering to our duty. We are such children that we cannot grasp woe unless we see a picture of it, nor recognise plain obligation without some sentimental masquerade. Therefore must we visualise a

“ little ” Belgium and seek our patriotism at the music-hall. It is perhaps natural, and we should not be too ready with irony. Let those who would declare this factitious emotion to be confined to the sentimental remember that hard-headed men of business were supposed to look more kindly on an investment when presented in the guise of battered tanks and mud-covered guns. In a word the war was too big for us in the beginning and, thank God for our peace of mind, has remained too big for us ever since.

In the early days little that was not trivial. I have two impressions and two only. The first a procession of larrikins waving flags and blowing trumpets in Piccadilly, the second a glimpse of soldiers in service dress and sailors with bundles under their arms emerging from a Soldiers' and Sailors' Club in the Waterloo Road. “ Good luck, Tommy ! ” “ Good luck, Jack ! ” and the war had begun.

This was the time when all men who wanted to think deeply and wisely, to strike the just mean between the guileless fool of the legend and the honourable man of the world, looked for a lead to the columns of *The National Conscience*. How blunderingly, pitifully wrong they found its leaders, in mistakenness how nobly and passionately conceived. The writer was the stuff the apostles were made of—so much leaped at you from the printed sheet. He wore his complicated integrity on his sleeve, conducting with Jesuitical artistry an argument of Quakerish simplicity—as who should say the loose-fitting soul of a Don Quixote in supreme possession of his wits. And in the manipulation of these wits the very genius of marshaldom. Never

was argument more Christianly devised nor more ingenuously distorted.

“It is admitted by the interventionists—to coin a word as hateful as the thing—that this country has no direct interest in the quarrel, save the elementary one of seeing fair play between Belgrade and Vienna. But that is not a British interest at all. Our interest is fair play in England, fair play in our coal-fields, in our cotton mills and shipyards, fair play in the slums of English cities and not in the chancelleries of Europe. And why, even granted this hypothetical interest, should the Slav be so much dearer to us than the Teuton that on his behalf we should tax the necessaries of the poor to famine prices and the income of the rich to extinction? For let us recognise that this is the ultimate meaning of war.”

O noble and purblind soul, seeing no inch beyond the moment's generosity! Not a word about the safety or the peril of England with Germany mistress of France and the Channel Ports.

“Duty and interest demand that this country shall not make itself an accessory in this awful crime against reason and human happiness. The burden of war has always fallen and must always fall on the mass of the community, on the people. War means putting back the clock of progress and human prosperity for a hundred years. War will take away from our people all their statesmen have given them since the days of Pitt; war must inevitably throw us back to the dark days of crime, suffering and disease. The Government is

the trustee of the people. It cannot sacrifice the people's welfare on the altar of a mistaken chivalry."

Brilliant advocacy that can attribute its own pet weakness to the other side !

"Until we actually go to war it would be criminal for any Englishman to maintain silence who believes, as in our opinion the majority still do, that participation in this war would be against the honourable duty that we owe to our own folk."

O gallant debater, what evil spirit endowed you at birth with that childlike innocency and idealism for ever leading you astray in this real world ?

Lastly the grand and sober amends :

"England has declared war, and discussion is over. Our country is on the eve of battle and the ranks close up. We are united to win."

Tears came into the eyes of many as they read this declaration of conscience. Into my own eyes as I thought of old Warden sitting in his midnight den, less like a great editor than a wistful fisher of men, fingering his grey beard in a last effort to save the world. Warden is the last disciple of a disinterested faith ; it is enough that a cause should be unpopular for him to espouse it passionately. He has belief in his fellow-man, the true apostolic fervour and the zest for martyrdom. True that he is seldom in touch with life or with emotion other than the ascetic's, that he lacks companions in

nobility. He is a brooding eagle inhabiting an eyrie, blinded by the glory of his inward visions. Distraught and wrapped about with virginity, he hears voices. . . .

But England had another and more mischievous press which for the evil that it would do lacked the sanction of this full-blown ecstasy. How well one could foretell its babble. That the German, as distinct from the Prussian, is at heart a good fellow; that if it be noble and fitting to die for one's country it is not less noble to die that our good and peace-loving neighbour may rid himself of his Prussian yoke; that all that downrightness and vigour smacking regrettably of the Nelson touch must, by irritating neutrals, be to our disadvantage and to the ultimate good of the enemy; that blockades are only successful according to their elasticity; that a military decision must not be expected; that the dismemberment of the German Empire would be a calamity to Britain. So the bulk of craven pacifism.

Nor can I think more favourably of those Conservative news sheets which by pretty pictures and pithy anecdotes, by the "vivid" dispatches of their war correspondents, by all that is silly, vulgar and inept, were yet to force our politicians to the winning of the war.

"Are the people," wrote Claud Rodd in the starchiest of London journals "never to possess a newspaper written in their proper interests and combining a sense of humanity, a broad Imperial outlook and the fastidious sincerity of *The National Conscience*? Labour has no greater failure to show than its inability to enrol the aristocratic brain."

§ ii

And then there were practical things to be done. Maps to be bought, large scale the better to hearten us; Serbia and Bulgaria to be definitely located; exact computations of populations and armies; discussion as to the propriety of throwing our little handful across the Channel or keeping it for protection at home; theories of defence to be elaborated hardly less naïve than the epaulments, ravelins, half-moons, curtains and bastions of Corporal Trim. One had investments to reckon up, and it became matter for congratulation that the Midland Railway really does stick to the centre of England instead of nosing dangerously round the Eastern Coast. Mentally one cut one's losses in the Düsseldorf People's Palace, the Moonlight-on-the-Alster Soul-Awakening Steamboat Promenade Company, and the Nuremberg Up-to-date Mediæval-Restoring and Beer-Gardening Club. And one went to the bank and exchanged gold for little slips of paper. Throughout this queer texture of patriotic ardour and practical calculation there would run ever and anon the anxious thought—what new gun, explosive or monstrous device could Germany possess that she dared defy us?

And then Liége fell.

And Namur.

About this time I received through a round-about source the following letter from Reinecke:—

Do you remember, Ned, an old letter of yours about the balance of power in Europe, and how England and Germany were strong enough to beat France if she should grow too proud and Russia if she allowed

herself to growl too loudly. And I replied you not to write any such nonsense, as two intelligent people did not need to bother their honourable heads upon so barbarous a thing as war. And now this barbarity has come true and we must cut each other's throats like butchers who have lost their honourable senses. It is too grotesque ; I do not know whether to laugh or cry. My relations are very serious about it all. "Curt," they have said to me solemnly, "when you have invaded England already, it will be better that you do not kill your English friends and to torture them only a little. . . ." I am not afraid that if the English take me prisoner I shall be tortured very much. You do not understand war. . . . Germans make war thoroughly, like Wagner wrote his operas. . . .

What is so terrible is that I do not know who is right and that it does not matter. I am a German now and must think German. Those mad Englishmen who were on the side of the Boers in your Boer War, do they still exist ? I suppose they must be finding that Germany has a lot of right on her side. We are stronger than you ; a pro-Englander would not be allowed to live. Yet there are things in this question which could make me take an English view of it, only I was a soldier before the war and have learned to discipline the mind as well as the arms and legs. And therefore I must be German. There is nothing left for me now except the triumph of the Fatherland. Do not smile at this word ; it stands for a good German thing. And yet though we must beat England, there are a great many things in your country which I must love. There are your beautiful English villages and your gentle English ways. When people are not

stupid there is no need to make rules and to order them about. All English people are like the old men in Maeterlinck; they have lived a great deal and have learned something. Germans are like the children in Maeterlinck crying in the dark, and so they hold the Emperor's hand. It does not matter that he should be a *kemach*; he is the master. . . .

But there is much in Germany that the English do not understand. We, too, have our beautiful villages and pleasant customs. It is too favourable to judge of Germany by its Jews alone, but even the inferior peoples, when you know them, have to be loved in spite of their arrogant bull-necks. They will die, not because to die is a fine thing, but because they are Germans. . . .”

One evening Rodd heaved into my room.

“I am not easy about it all,” he said.

“Any news to-night?”

“They've sunk some cruisers in the Channel. Old ones. And they're precious nearly through Belgium. But that isn't the point. I can't stand this.” And he indicated the wet street along which bedraggled humanity was marching in fours.

“Their clothes'll stink when they get in, you know. Can't you *see* their boots, and their feet?” He paused and after a time went on savagely:

“I don't want to join and I've no excuse. I haven't had my whack of fun yet and I don't want to be killed. I'm fit enough, I'm not too old, and I don't think I'm really a coward. But I don't want to leave all this. I've written to Old Morality about it.”

“And what does Mark say?”

“What you’d expect. Something about war being a hellish business and every man a blackguard if he doesn’t take a hand. He goes on to say that he has a wife and family, a heart murmur, and nearly fifty years to boot and that he’s considering. He’s afraid he’ll have to be content with ‘taking an interest’ in something or other, in making toast in a ward or looking after soldiers’ wives.”

I showed him Reinecke’s letter.

“Hope he comes through,” he replied after he had glanced at it. “But I’ve no time for him at the moment. It’s Claud Rodd that’s worrying me. He’ll have to go. Bissett’s gone. He’ll be a Brigadier in no time—he’s the clean-living sort, you know, plays with a straight bat, Public School all over him. That’s not a sneer. He’ll do well. He’s no fool; the men will like him and he’ll freeze on to all the forlorn hopes going. I’ve just had a letter in which he says he’s expecting his commission at any minute. Tells a story about his sergeant-major. It seems he made the mistake of addressing the fellow as ‘chum.’ ‘If it’s a blasted chum you want,’ said the swine, carefully spitting on Reggie’s boots—you know the polish he’d have on ’em—‘get behind them bloody latrines. You’ll find a bleeding dawg there and you can chum up with him.’”

“You can’t run an army without discipline,” I said.

“Of course you can’t, and that’s the exasperating part of it. But who wants to run an army anyhow, or to be within a thousand miles of one? Abolish your Liberals and Conservatives and bring in your Socialists, not in this country but all the world over, and there’d be no need for armies. You can’t be a soldier and a man. ‘I obey, therefore I exist’ is the

theory. The military mind thinks the whole of life is contained in getting scuttlers and hooligans and you and me to bob and curtsy to it. Morally it's the knout they wield. Why, man, they've the right to search you for lice, inspect your feet, appraise your teeth, to go paddling in your neck with their damned fingers. All under the pretence that war's a great game. There ain't five recruits in a hundred who have any idea of what war is. Or if they have that makes the obligation on us all the greater. They're our dregs and they show us the way."

I demurred to dregs.

"Anyhow it's going to be dull. There'll be months of training, of being herded together like cattle, and my publishers will expect me to write a pretty book about it for the drawing-room table. Good-bye."

"You're not going——" I began.

"Going to think about it a bit longer," he replied.

§ iii

A few days later Rodd came to see me again and at once returned to the charge.

"It's not fair to the chaps who've joined up that we should look upon them sentimentally. War is more than an emotion; it's a big, stupid thing and I can't bring myself to look upon it heroically. All fighting isn't heroism, nor all dying heroic. There's damp huts and pneumonia, the whole inefficient rigmarole. And yet I've got to join. I shall empty latrines and try not to write comic articles about it. I shall hate the whole business, the fuss, the patriotism—oh, above all I shall hate the patriotism, the voicing of it, I mean.

And I shall want to loathe all these tramps and louts and I shan't be able to. Then I shall want to get to know them and again I shan't be able to. My tongue won't be theirs ; I shall be outside their lingo."

He stood by the window drumming on the pane.

"I wish they'd choose any other street to march down, damn them ! Don't they look cold ?"

I have a great power of silence and waited to let him have his say out.

"There's a fellow looking up at your windows," he broke off suddenly. "He's been hanging about for some time. Any enemies, Ned ?"

"Lots," I answered. "What does he look like ?"

"Shabby and wet. Anyhow he's rung."

After a minute or so my old housekeeper announced that a young man wanted to see Mr Marston and refused to give his name.

"'E looks 'arf-starved, poor dear, and that miserable."

"Show him up, Mrs Lyon, and bring tea."

The young man came in, blinked a little at the light, and stood by the door twisting the corner of his sodden cap. A hint of the gentleman, the cut of the clerk, a suspicion of defiant misery. I was totally unprepared for what was to come.

"Which of you is Mr Marston ?" he asked.

"Wait a bit," said Claud, thrusting in before I could speak. "What's your name, my lad, and what's your business ?"

"I want to know which of you is my father," he replied.

"By God !" said Claud rising, "this is up to you, Ned."

"Sit down, man." And Claud sat down.

“ So you are Mr Marston ? ” the boy went on slowly, turning to me.

“ That is my name,” I replied. “ Come in and let me give you something. You look cold. Pull yourself together. We’ll talk afterwards.”

The truth was that it was I who stood in need of being pulled together.

The boy came into the room and took a seat by the fire whilst I busied myself with whiskies and soda.

And now I wonder whether I owe the reader an apology. I believe I owe myself one. For I determined, when I set out, to deal only in essentials, to eliminate all those lightings and re-lightings of cigars, dispositions of hats and gloves, triflings with tea-cups and glasses which take up so much time and are such a bore to recount. I wanted to get at essential truth and now I find that for a while this meeting with my son resolves itself into offers of tea and cigarettes. The truth is that I felt the need of gaining time. The boy very obviously held himself on the defensive, accepting the proffered hospitality out of courtesy.

After a little while during which I watched him as narrowly as I decently might, looking for Clare whose son alone he must be, I said :

“ Now, my boy, let us clear all this up. Will you tell me your name ? ”

“ Tremblow, sir.”

“ Never mind about the ‘ sir.’ Edward Tremblow ? ” I asked.

“ It was Edward. I changed it to Dick. I’ve never been beholden to anybody.”

I had little doubt about his being Clare’s child. The honest grey eyes, the quick turn of the head spoke of

Clare and I felt the blood rush to my face and my heart to thump and beat like a sledge-hammer. I began to tremble as on the eve of some happening. I had the sense of peril, of the tension that goes before some desperate leap, of the age-long second that precedes and determines.

“And your mother?” I heard myself saying.

“Dead twelve years ago. I hardly remember her. You’ve nothing to fear from either of us.”

“Good God, man,” I cried, “I fear nothing this side the grave except my own nerves, and nothing at all the other.” An outburst sufficiently silly, but I was excited.

“Tell us,” said Claud in his most level, matter-of-fact tone, “tell Mr Marston why you’ve come to him now and not before.”

“I want to know who brought me into all this,” he replied, waving his arm vaguely and with a gesture comprehending more than the room and the street. “I want to know at whose instigation”—I caught Rodd’s wondering eye—“I have suffered—and endured and enjoyed. Oh yes, I’ve enjoyed too.”

He looked at his boots and the knees of his trousers.

“My mother died when I was about five or six. She was married then and her husband used to thrash us both. Her oftener than me. One evening he put us out into the street and we walked about all night. She took pneumonia a week later. I remember the man crying a lot after she was dead. I don’t know his name and I’ve never seen him since. I was sent to an orphanage near Reading.”

He paused a moment.

“Poor girl,” I heard Claud whisper.

“Go on,” I said.

“ On the morning of her death my mother called me to her and said : ‘ Ned, I’m not long for this world.’ ”

“ Did she really say that ? ” I asked, the writer and phrasemaker in me damnably agog.

“ I don’t remember the exact words,” he returned. “ She felt she hadn’t long to live and said so. What’s wrong with the words ? ”

“ Nothing’s wrong,” said Claud, “ Mr Marston wants to be quite sure of understanding your mother’s meaning.”

“ Go on,” I urged.

“ She then told me that my father was not the man who lived with us but the Mr Marston who wrote the books. She wrote the name on a piece of paper and told me to come to you if ever I wanted you, but not unless. ‘ Your father was good to me,’ she said, ‘ good according to his lights, and remember, Ned, I’ve no complaints to make and have never made any. Don’t forget that, Ned.’ And I’ve not forgotten, as you see.”

We sat silent for a moment.

“ Are you rich, either of you ? ” he asked suddenly.

“ Poor as a church mouse,” said Rodd promptly.

“ More than I know what to do with,” from me.

“ I’m sorry,” he returned simply.

“ Don’t you——” I began, and then I saw the old stubborn look which used to be Clare’s come into his eyes. He gave a shrug of contempt and my question died away.

“ But, my dear Mr Tremblow, won’t you tell us, won’t you tell your father ”—here he looked at me and I nodded—“ what it is you do want ? ”

“ I want acknowledgment,” said the boy, “ just that and no more. I don’t want sympathy and a

decent kindness and all the charitable bag of tricks. I've earned my own way up to now. I've picked up a living, not much of a one, but a living, in a shop or two, in offices, in a goods yard, down at the docks. I've been dresser to a fashionable actor and I've sold papers. Sometimes I've sunk, sometimes I've risen, but always I've been master of my soul. I've nothing to be ashamed of and it has been life all the time. But now I want acknowledgment, not before the world, as they say, but to my own face. Oh, I've not come here to make a fuss. I know how men use women. I've seen it from the street, and life's different when you've seen it from the street. It doesn't look at all the same as it does to you people in houses, and yet I'm not satisfied. There's not enough reason for me. The world beats about me as it beats about every lad that has parents who want him, and I feel that I have not been wanted. I lie awake at night, and say to myself: 'You are not wanted.' I lie awake and feel that I've stolen my right to a share in all this."

"All this?" from Claud.

"I'm joining up in a day or two and I made up my mind that before I joined I would try to find my father, in case he wanted me now. Ever so little would do. And then I was curious; I am curious. There are a hundred things I want to know, that I've puzzled over and can't find an answer to. I want to know whether having no father takes from me the right to a child. I want to know whether marriage matters, whether if I come through this I shall have anything to hand on. Do I begin a new race or end an old one, or do I just not count at all? For if I don't count then I've less to offer than any other of the lads."

He made a quick change of ground.

“Do you know what it is to live on twenty-two shillings a week?” he asked. “I was getting that when this happened.”

He pulled out of his pocket a bit of paper with some figures on it and put it into our hands. We could see that it was a weekly calculation of ways and means telling of bare lodgings and meagre shovelfuls of coal, of scanty clothing and insufficient meals.

“Do you realise what twenty-two shillings a week means? It means that if you want to buy a book you have to choose between having no fire or no breakfast for a week. It means that you can hardly afford to be clean, that you haven't the money to get drunk when you're wretched. And then there's Saturday and Sunday to be got through. Do you know I've hung about the Park on Sunday nights for hours together listening to the speakers to keep myself from thinking. I'm afraid of my own thoughts; I'm afraid of loneliness and that's why I've come here.”

“Where are you living?” I asked.

“That's my affair,” he answered. “It isn't money I want and it isn't meals and it isn't clothes. I just want to feel before I go out there that I'm not alone in the world. Perhaps I shan't come back. There's thousands won't come back.”

“I'm going too,” said Rodd. He told me afterwards that it was at that moment that he made up his mind. The other gave a short laugh.

“You'll go as an officer,” he said. “I'll be your servant if you like.”

“What’s moving you to join?” Rodd asked curiously.
“What has England done for you?”

“Good Lord, man, it’s not a debt I’m paying. And yet it is in a way. I’m joining for the sake of the beauty in the world that you comfortable folk never see. You don’t know how lovely the Park is when you are at dinner and one can be alone with the reddening trees; you don’t even know the *feel* of a good meal. You’ve never tightened your belt to listen to music; you get into fine clothes instead. The whole world is full of beauty for those who are poor enough to see it, though it may be it’s only our dreams. They say all visionaries are half starved. Anyhow whether the beauty is there or whether I only imagine it, it’s there for me. I want to do something beautiful in return and there’s so little I can do except give my life. I can’t write and I can’t paint and I’m worth exactly twenty-two shillings a week. What is there in front of me? Twenty-five shillings, thirty, then perhaps a couple of pounds and a pittance at the end if I strike a generous lot. Well, here’s the great chance. It’s the great chance, I take it, for all us clerks. At least I shall be free, and by God I’ve had enough of being hired.”

After that he would not say another word. Suddenly he got up and held out his hand which I grasped awkwardly enough.

“I’ll come again, if I may?”

“I want you to come whenever you like,” I said and refrained from saying more. I felt that this was to be a great thing in my life and that I must not squander it in effusiveness.

Besides I wanted more time for thought. Reparation

had waited twenty years ; the urgency was not one of minutes.

The boy turned to Rodd.

“ Are you always here ? ” he asked.

“ No,” said Claud, “ but you can call on me, Praed Street, 47A, over the shop.”

“ You’re not bound to ask me,” said Tremblow, with rude graciousness, “ but I’d like you to.”

“ To-morrow then, about this time. And we’ll come on to you afterwards, Ned.”

The boy nodded and was gone.

“ Had you never thought of all this ? ” Claud asked abruptly, as the door closed.

“ Yes. But always in connection with blackmail and that sort of thing.”

“ He’s a gentleman. I’m not being snobbish.”

“ That makes it all the worse. The classic thing is that you’re responsible for some wretched creature of the gutter. That has never moved me greatly. Either you don’t know, or if you do, money puts it more or less right. But to have brought a fine, sensitive soul into the world with all its possibilities of misery—that’s hell. And yet it’s fine too. It’s a wonderful thing. I don’t in the least grasp it.”

“ Better you shouldn’t. You’ll go to extremes, as usual.”

“ I want him,” I said.

“ He’s wanted you any time these twenty years. Better be humble, Ned.”

“ And then there’s Clare,” I began.

“ I don’t think she comes in. Suppose, Ned, we use a little of that mental honesty you’re so plaguey handy with when there’s no need for it. You

finished with Clare ever so long ago. You haven't thought of her these ten years, probably twenty. You've outgrown her. You outgrew her long ago. You're trying to put the clock back. You're sentimentalising. You wouldn't know what to do with her if you had her now. Confess you don't want her now."

"I don't," I said after a pause. "And it's humiliating."

"It's natural and inevitable," declared Rodd, "and humiliation doesn't come in."

And then we settled down to thrash the matter out. We went over the whole ground, the noble heights and the treacherous fall. We talked of passion brooking no hindrance and seeking no excuse, of "youthful indiscretion," of base appetite. We recalled Westrom's "It must be tremendous fun to be a rake; I haven't any doubt that marriage with companionship and children is finer." We recalled our youthful assertion as to the one indisputable thing in heaven and earth: the will for continuance.

"Ah!" said Claud, "but we mustn't confuse fatherhood with indulgence. Civilised man is under an obligation according to the code of his kind, the Englishman according to the English code, though it's less amusing than his neighbour's. It isn't fair in the most elementary sense of fairness to keep only such clauses of the civil contract as are convenient. All this doesn't prevent its being better to be the natural son of a great man than heir to the village grocer. It was so in the days of Falconbridge and will be so again. The slur of illegitimacy is a purely Victorian interlude. It is Victorian simply because it is understood in the

wrong way. Illegitimacy is to be reprov'd not as a breaking of a mystical law but as a breach of the social contract. Do you remember the Twinney woman, the vicar's wife at Crawley Bridge ? ”

I nodded.

“ Well, she had in one corner of her drawing-room a statue called Maternity—a mother exhibiting her child and her wedding ring with equal pride. That's Victorianism. What isn't Victorianism is the realisation that the slur is on the father, not on the child ; and, of course, principally on the score of desertion. You weren't technically guilty of desertion but you would have been.”

“ Yes,” I replied, “ I suppose I would, and I can't get the old-fashioned idea of punishment out of my head. It's so monstrously unfair that I should get off scot-free.”

“ Oh, but you won't, not by a long chalk,” retorted Claud. “ I know you, Ned ; you're going to make a great fuss of this fellow and get infernally fond and proud of him and talk about devoting your whole life to him. This may mean as much as half-an-hour a day, but you'll think it's your whole life. And you'll be tremendously happy about it all until you realise that you're just a common thief reaping where you haven't sown. Your fatherhood wasn't utterly base but it wasn't considered. You never gave the boy a ha'porth of care, you had none of the anxiety of him, you hardly knew he existed. You're a tremendous fellow, Ned, and you'll play the father tremendously. But you're a filcher of happiness all the same. Affection and not generosity is the only reparation ; affection is what you'll have to give. And if you can

manage that you may be able to forgive yourself for having been found with your hand in the sack of common happiness. It's your own responsibility; nobody else can forgive you, or help you. Nobody in fact cares twopence about it."

"Thank God," I replied, "that there is a sack of common happiness anyhow. I'm going to lay my hand on every ounce it contains. I've got something better to live for now than I've had for twenty years."

"It'll be selfishness all the same," returned Rodd, "but perhaps selfishness of a better sort."

This was the first of many conversations in this strain.

§ iv

And then we both began to see quite a lot of Dick. The timid bluster of his first visit had given place to a shy confidence. At times he would hardly utter a word and at others would deliver himself of a spate of eager, scurrying ardours. I found in him a Socialist of my own impatient, over-emphatic order. He knew something of music, a little of pictures and a great deal about birds and butterflies. I did not ask how in a London suburb one acquires natural history. He harped continually upon the string of consideration for others; there wasn't a generosity he didn't jump to. Claud took to him to an altogether extraordinary degree.

One day Dick said shyly: "Won't you both come to tea at my place?" And he gave an address near Victoria Station.

“ I don't know whether he's in or out,” said the little drab who opened the door. “ We never know when Mr Tremblow is in. A very quiet gentleman is Mr Tremblow. I know he's expecting, 'cos he ordered a second jug o' milk this morning. Fifth floor.”

We mounted the stairs to a little attic on the door of which was pinned a neat injunction to go in and wait. The room was scrupulously clean, the furniture a truckle bed, a dressing-table that might have originally been orange boxes, a simple wash-stand, a small table and two or three chairs. In a corner a pair of dumb-bells and an old cricket-bat. On the mantelpiece one or two photographs, apparently of friends at an office. On the walls several cheap pictures suggesting a reaching out after self-improvement, chiefly prints of Watts in didactic mood. On a tiny shelf an odd dozen of books included *Unto this Last*, *Richard Feverel*, *Treasure Island*, Arthur Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets*, *Tono-Bungay*, Morris's *News from Nowhere*, two stories by Gissing and a Shakespeare. But what struck us most of all was a number of lay-texts written out in the same handwriting as that of the piece of paper on the door and fastened to the wall by drawing-pins in places convenient for reading. Under the gas-bracket Henley's familiar verses anent the captaincy of his soul.

“ He quoted that, if you remember,” said Claud.

Next to the shaving mirror Stevenson's *Under the Wide and Starry Sky* and one of his prayers. We noted also the familiar exhortation to kindness “ Since I shall not pass this way again,” and a verse by Miss Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

So many Gods, so many creeds,
 So many paths that wind and wind,
 When just the art of being kind
 Is all the sad world needs.

And then this sentimentality :

Go thou thy way and I go mine,
 Apart, yet not afar ;
 Only a thin veil hangs between
 The pathways where we are.

“ And God keep watch ’tween thee and me ”
 This is my prayer ;
 He looks thy way, He looketh mine,
 And keeps us near.

I sigh sometimes to see thy face,
 But since that may not be
 I’ll leave thee to the care of Him
 Who cares for thee and me.

A tap at the door and Dick came in. After explaining that he had been detained at the office he said with a certain dignity : “ Now let me make you welcome.” And waving his hand at the table : “ It’s a bit substantial for afternoon tea in your world, but it’s my best meal, you know.”

The substantial things were in tins, sardines and a tongue.

“ Where I teas, I dines,” said Rodd. “ I’m going out for a bottle of whisky.”

It was the first money we had been allowed to spend on the boy and I do not think he would have accepted it from me. He made no sort of difficulties with Rodd however.

As soon as the door had closed Dick turned and said point-blank :

“ I think you’re a good man, although you’ve been

a selfish one. I've got selfish instincts too, but I'm fighting them. I don't want you to bother about being my father. We're just friends. Will that do?"

"Nothing would suit me better," I said as simply as possible.

"Tell me what you think of my pictures."

And we fell to discussing whether Watts really does lack colour or whether our demands are too gaudy.

"Of course he's got no colour," said Claud, coming back, "he's just dull. Dull and dingy and drab like life at Crawley Bridge. Do you remember *Numéro Vingt Boulevard Croix de Shufflebottom*, Ned? I'm not sure that that wasn't the best time of our lives. Youth! The golden fling, you know."

"I think the war is the golden fling," said Dick. "In the national sense."

It was an unforgettable meal. In some way the boy had got to calling Claud "Rodd." Me he invariably addressed as "Mr Marston." It seemed a strange, inverted acknowledgment of a tie, and in a way I was glad of it.

"My time's short now," said Dick, "they're letting me go at the end of next week."

"I think," said Rodd, "my time's about up too, and that it would be absurd for me not to join your lot, if you'll have me."

"I expect you to," replied the lad.

And now I began to realise expiation after the manner which Claud had promised. The absorbing interest which had come into my life along a line of unimagined susceptibility had quickly deepened to affection, and at last I had begun to know the true joy of parentage, the expenditure of self. A fig for stolen happiness! I

was immensely happy. Happy until the dread matter of joining up became more than talk. A date had been fixed, a date which loomed ahead, the gateway to suspense. I will not enlarge here; all our English fathers will know what I mean. And now it was that my fatherhood took on a different shade. I began to realise that less even than my right to happiness was the right to elder sacrifice which at that time stood behind the bright boyish renunciations.

O greatest of all renunciations, that sombre sacrifice of the fathers of England offering up in their children their proper immortality! Theirs the sacrifice hallowed by the most august of sanctions; God so loved the world. . . . But my offering was different. Of anxiety and apprehension I was to know the full share; of that pride which is the anodyne of grief I was to have no share at all. In the worst case not even the supreme consolation would be mine. I had filehed happiness; the tragic uplift which is bereavement I might have had to steal also.

§ v

And then they both joined up. From Rodd's first letters I gathered that training in the army is not the semi-serious, wholly facetious business our writers of war books and contributors to *Punch* would make it out to be. Claud wrote of one long round of boredom and monotony, of petty spite, vindictiveness, and meaningless, petty tyranny. Romantic glamour is the decent cloak we throw over the thing.

“Write me as one who loathes his fellow-men. It is
“Sunday afternoon, the rain rattles on the tin roof

“like an artillery of pea-shooters, all around us is a
“sea of mud from which the huts rise up like submerged
“wrecks at low water. Thirty of us are lying on our
“beds talking and spitting, writing and spitting. A
“few asleep. A man with a clasp-knife on the left of
“me is performing an operation on an ingrowing toe-
“nail. I know by heart the shape of his feet, when
“he washed them last and when he will wash them
“again. The fellow on my right is sleeping off the
“effects of his Saturday night’s debauch. He was sick
“in the space between our floorboards. Your boy
“Dick held his head and cleaned up for him. . . . I
“hate the damp, close smell of men’s bodies. I hate
“all proximities. The swearing annoys me. It is per-
“functory and unimaginative. I transcribe from a
“recital of woes in progress as I write.

“ ‘So I says to the Corp’r’l: “Where the ’ell do you
“want the bleeding bucket?” “In the bloody corner,”
“says ’e. “Oh,” says I. And I puts the thing in the
“bloody corner. Then the blarsted Sergeant comes
“along. “Wot the ’ell’s this bleeding bucket doing
“’ere?” ’e says.’ And so on. Nobody listens; the
“fellow drones on. ‘Wot time is it?’ sings out a
“man three beds away. Somebody tells him the time.
“ ‘Another hour, and then for some bloody beer,’ and
“he gives an anticipatory belch.

“And yet I know these to be brave fellows. I
“know that great deeds are maturing, that it is I and
“not they who risk being shot for cowardice. My
“point is that fine feelings are no part of war and
“that you sentimentalists cannot stomach us unless
“we are dressed up like heroes in a schoolboy tale. I
“have a great respect for our sergent-major, the same

“kind of respect that one has for the fellow in gold braid who opens cab doors at the Trocadero. I have had a peep into his mind. What an abyss!

“Dick is full of the passion for service and it is wonderful to watch the things he will do for the most case-hardened ruffian. There is a quality of ecstasy about all he does. I’ve seen him wash the feet of a man who was too fagged to do it for himself. No one else would dream of such a thing nor would it have been acceptable at any other hands. The fellow is a Covent Garden porter, lets Dick do as he likes and follows him round the camp like a dog. And now I must tell you a funny thing. He and I were both offered jobs as officer’s servant. Your son turned it down at once, whereas I jumped at it out of sheer boredom. Of course it’s amusing. The fellow is a dressy little chap out of a bank. I model myself on the butler in *The Admirable Crichton* and wash my hands with invisible soap, but ‘my officer’ is impervious to irony. It’s an immense lark.”

From which it will be seen that in spite of himself Claud was beginning to fall into the “schoolboy” style. Dick wrote seldom. He was busy doing things, he explained. They always contrived to come up on leave together and we sucked pleasure out of the town as we had never done before. We tasted London; we smacked our lips over it; inhaled its blessed air and stared with new-washen eyes at its jewelled streets—Claud, because he was so soon to leave it and had I think some secret foreboding, Richard because of his newly-found friends. We would walk the streets for

hours together. We would begin at the little island in Piccadilly Circus where the flower women, the fountain, and the little flighty statue are, cross over to the corner by the Monico and adventure through the absurd beginnings of a colonnade, Dick bestowing something on the old lady with the grey hair falling scantily down sunken cheeks. There was something in the withered grace of this poor creature which set her back in a legendary past. Rodd would insist upon stage-triumphs of the seventies and memories fragrant with old-fashioned bouquets and the scent of patchouli. We never heard her voice; her thanks were conveyed in a delicate, well-bred simper. Then on along the magnificent curve of Regent Street above which clouds are always massing as in Pennell's drawing. We would sit for hours in the Café Royal and Rodd would talk of Rothenstein and Beardsley and Wilde, and Dick would listen and laugh at what he called our "well-dressed" enthusiasm. Or he would shake those black locks of his, and the nettled look would come into his eyes and he would tell us how waiters live. . . .

Then we would indulge in one of those incredible Soho dinners where the world is again pagan. One wonders whether these little restaurants have survived the war. Strange how their simplicities, the miniature chairs and rickety tables, the half-dozen stunted shrubs in green pots, the too-candid windows and the discreet curtains imbued us all with primitive gaiety, how the certainty of being overheard removed all barriers to free speech.

"I remember," said Rodd, "taking a millionaire to the Queen's Hall and piloting him through some

Debussy. I charged him a guinea and he dined me at the Majestic afterwards. It was like eating thirty shillings' worth of pile carpets and gilt mirrors."

It goes without saying that Rodd invented intimate and scandalous history to explain the light-heartedness of the diners. Now and again pale-faced, bespectacled women, "sad" in the pastry sense of sadness, would put in a startled appearance. Dick would have them to be art students or suffragettes, I leaning to the theory of Repertory actresses out of work, Rodd maintaining that they must be materialisations of Henry James, whom by the way he adored. Once, wonderfully, we heard a little man with a trick of screwing up his eyes explain in a high-pitched eager voice how much better they do this sort of thing in Bursley.

Then we would go down to that other of London's magnificent curves, the Embankment, and it would be Dick's turn to talk. He could tell such tales of poverty as are unknown to the doctors of the body politic prescribing with head averted from the disease. He would tell of the hunger that is hunger indeed, and not the reward of a day's tramp among hills.

Or we would make an excursion to the Zoological Gardens and listen whilst Claud recited the last royal pages of *Manette Salomon* before some stupendous cage. Or walk up and down before the bars of Wellington Barracks, where the soldiers pace the dull Sunday away. Here Dick had a chum or two, and we would be presented with ceremony and get strange glimpses of a mentality which is not the civilian's. And once we saw the departure of a draft of Grenadiers. Remember that we were not winning then. As the band played the men out of the gates and through the crowd I saw

that Rodd was frankly crying. Dick's face was bright and shining, his elation taking the practical turn.

"Don't let's miss the train back to-night," he said, putting his arm through Rodd's.

"Rum soldiers, you two," I observed.

Often they would bring on leave with them the Covent Garden porter, who was a boxer of fame down Lambeth way. The fellow had the most perfectly gorgeous shock of red hair and an unbounded admiration for Dick; he had neither parents nor friends, and was I thought a trifle shy of the police. Such manners as he had were not good, but he meant well. Both he and Dick took it as a matter of course that they should not be separated. I hope Claud and I accepted Ernie Crowe with good grace, though he did cut a rum figure on occasion. He spoke seldom, and when he did it was to ring the changes on half-a-dozen catch-words. "It's s'no use!" "S'marvellous!" "From the sublime to the gor-blimy!" "Another spasm, Bert" was his invariable way of asking for a second helping, and when his glass was empty he would rub a wetted finger round the rim and say: "If this glass speaks it wants more." Or he would sing to himself tunelessly by the hour together ditties reminiscent of the cheaper music-halls. I do not suppose I shall ever forget the crazy words:

I wore a tunic,
A smart khaki tunic,
While you wore your civvy clothes,
You drank our booze
While we fought at Loos,
Ypres, the Aisne and the Marne;
You stole our wenchies
While we were in the trenches
Fighting an angry foe,

You were a-slacking
 While we were attacking
 The Huns on the Menin Road.

And these :

Oh, give three cheers
 Or all that you can spare
 For I'm one of the stay-at-home Brigade
 Admired by every pretty maid ;
 And if war breaks out
 I'll be the first to go—
 Down to the station to see them off
 But not to fight the foe.

I never heard him sing any other songs but at these he would drone away for hours without semblance of either animation or interest.

Once Dick wrote to say that on the following Saturday "Ginger" was to box fifteen rounds at Darcy's, the dingy little booth which as all the world knows is just over the river. Saturday evening saw us installed in the narrow plush seats below the ropes and immediately behind the referee.

I am not at all sure that the boxing ring is not the most fascinating of all entertainments. The principals are so convincingly in earnest and their emotion, unlike the actor's, is unrehearsed. The spectators for the most part have been principals in their turn, and they are the finest critics of their art. You may, an you are malicious, make pathological compare with the amateurish ecstasies of your actor at a professional *matinée*. The crowd is fascination unleavened, the over-aware, leering crowd of backers, trainers and their attendant "stables," of evil-smelling mechanicals, roughs of the suspect muffer and dandiical, too explicit boots, greasy publicans of the gaudy and evil-speaking hands, battered warriors *en pleine déca-*

dence, a nigger or two. Fascination in the coarse tobacco, the sawdust, the spittle; in the reek and squalor, the white glare of the arc lights. In these merciless rays there is no shadow, save under the eyes of the boxers and in the hollows of their throats; you would say the powdered dancers of some wistful ballet. Fascination in the four-sidedness of the ring, the way it will slew to rhombus and rhomboid, in the whity-grey strands of the twisted, dingy ropes, in the bucket and bottle common to the smaller, inconsiderable fry. Fascination in the seconds' economy of time, the precision with which they sling the chair to receive the drooping body. Deft beyond praise the manipulation of tired thighs, the chafing and the kneading, the restoration of the flesh and renewal of the spirit. Admirable in brotherliness the surgery of the corner. The flapping towels are a braver sight to me than any flutter of pennons or waving of standards. In a boxing booth I became conscious of my nationality, of the England of Sayers and Heenan, of Hazlitt's page.

No theatre in the world to which entry may be as exciting as this pushing, shouldering irruption, the quick passage down the clamorous human lane, the thrust over the boots of East-Enders supporting their chins on the very floor of the ring and drinking with open mouth and nostrils the fleck and spume of battle, the drench and dribble of their heroes. From all parts of the house the raucous cries:

“Box 'im, kid!”

“'Ave a fight, yeh barstard!”

“Go downstairs to 'im! Up ter yer elbow!”

“Shove 'is bleedin' 'e'd back!”

“Cure ’is bloody adenoids !”

Then when the blood flows freely :

“Jam for tea, muvver !”

“Punch the b—— open !”

“’E’s done ; knock ’ell out of ’im !”

And at last :

“Got ’im, be Christ !” as the lad goes down and sprawls on his stomach in utter disgrace. Then the count, the rise to the feet, the clumsy touch of the victor’s glove, the hawking and spitting, the backward padded wipe of the nose, the tumble through the ropes.

And the inherent beauty ? Oh, convincingly, imperishably, the beauty is there. Never have I seen setting sun throw his last rays of burnished copper more handsomely, glintingly, magically than through the open windows in the unpretentious dome. Windows are they, or doors ? They fold back shutter-wise to the sweating gallery walls, ostensible outlets for the emanations of humanity, insistently to me the gateways of romance. Dusk steals apace and these humble casements take on the blue of the doorways in *Scheherazade*, the ominous blue of the lovers’ portals. The darkness deepens and the trains thundering along the neighbouring railway bridge rock our crazy building but may not stir a fold in the draperies of the violet night. A moth hangs upon this curtain, hovers for a moment over the ring as though in curious inspection of some masterpiece in ivory, some Japanese sculptor’s *The Boxers*, brushes a bare shoulder and is lost in the night, the impenetrable night of Bermondsey and Bethnal Green. Pale they look against the blue, these taut, over-intense figures, their eyes a little weary, the shadows under them deepening with the strain. A

slip, a hand knocked down and the boxers touch gloves. As they cross to their corners at the bell the offender gives his opponent a friendly tap on the shoulder, the offender to reply with a flick to the point in token of perfect amity.

Sometimes I think this little ring at Darcy's a not unfitting symbol of the world. Better the stand-up fight under rules, nay, better the brawl at the street corner, than the queasy counterings of tradesmen. Stunted intelligence and perfect proportions ; "quiffs" of matted hair over low foreheads, shaven necks and perfect courage ; manners of the bully and working sense of fair play ; hands unimaginably decorated with butterflies, anchors, crossed hearts and women's names, exchanging indifferently the bandages of their trade for the copper, brass and silver tokens of their loves ; Greek statues descending with equanimity to the infamous cut and shoddy of East End wear—to me this has always been a world of infinite discovery, a world of which the absorbing interest is the sufficient sanction.

Of our bout not much to be said. Crowe strips like a model of Titian, burnt head of flame and skin of alabaster ; his opponent swartheness itself and shaking a black mane over eyes the mirror of the sea. Like most sailors he is grandly tattooed, the chief piece a Crucifixion, the Chinese cast in the countenance indicating some far-off Eastern station.

"You've got to be tattooed in the navy," explains Diek, "or else they think you're a mammy's boy."

"I remember a Frenchman telling me," says Claud, "that the custom is not popular in France with the exception of Pierre Loti and an occasional apache."

The sailor turns out to be much too good for

Crowe, who takes tremendous punishment with stolid endurance. "Golden blood lacing his silver skin," quotes Rodd, and the worse the punishment the harder the boy fights. "One, two, three," the gallery counts audibly as Ernie runs into the sailor's straight lefts. "Four," and again "Five." Our lad looks up with a grin. "Six," he shouts, and has his mouth cruelly closed. But no boxing crowd can resist pluck for long, and in the middle of the twelfth round, after the boy has been sent down four times, the gallery raises a sympathetic shout of "Turn it up, Ginger!" and Crowe drops his hands. Whereupon his opponent puts an arm round him and kisses him sailor-wise.

At other times there were the music-halls, among whose meaningless folly we discovered a gem which sent Rodd into ecstasies of decadent comparison. Imagine a woman no longer young and whose figure betrays no sign of sex. Lithe as a boy, she has a ramrod's dignity and poise. Her gestures have something of breeding and there is a conscious correctness in the accents of her deep and measured voice. Her tale a mockery of West End pavements, a romance of Piccadilly *à rebours*. The high-flyer on a broken wing, the *roué* in disastrous hey-day, the exquisite taking in his belt with a smile. And then the clothes! Beyond chemical aid, beyond mender's hope, never never to be rejuvenated *par les benzines*, they adorn their last human wearer. Next a scarecrow and last oblivion. Black, black, not a note of white, the stock staying the jaws as jaws must come to be stayed, ghastly-wise; this that seems alive is already dead. The matter of the song sheer tragedy, the manner purest music-hall;

pinched belly and moral wrack in terms of the un-surrendering jaunty

I've had a banana,
With Lady Di-an-a.

and the smile the strained and haggard grin of starvation.

But I notice that Dick's hands are clenched and his eye bright. "Bravo!" he cries.

Lovely, beyond all imagination lovely in sheer incredibility these palaces of the people, enlivened preposterously with a jumble of all the styles. French Louis tumbling over French Louis in a grab at the proscenium or a thrust for the balcony, the hindmost to content himself with architrave and lintel or whatever the architect's word for tops and sides. No hint of Greek frieze or Byzantine touch in the ceiling, and you may reckon the measure skimped. And then the plush, the ceaseless waves of red, unendurable plush.

"They remind me," says Rodd, "of that sentence of Daudet's in which he compares the break of waves to the flapping of wet blankets."

But there is enchantment in the place, I tell him, in the open mouths, the unashamed clasping of hands, the grotesque, counter-jumping elegance of the swains. Enchantment in the impact of the "artistes" upon the emporium's squires and dames. Enchantment in the quintessential commonness. To it, mediocrity, and pell-mell! Sentimental obscenity telling the beads of passion flagrantly factitious, you on the stage are an amusing sister to the high-born marketry zealously trumpeting her wares in the halfpenny press. Enchantment everywhere, in vice so decently veiled that we need not pretend to turn our heads, in the stolid

unobservant policemen, in the doorkeepers into whose soul the pitiful buffoonery has so pitilessly entered. . . .

And yet, and yet in all this stupid welter there is beauty and emotion to be discovered. After the interval the curtain is raised to disclose a grand piano—bearing the maker's name in letters a foot tall, but they permit that at even the best concerts—an immaculate gentleman in evening dress, a florid lady and a young person in pink. Immaculacy wields a flute, the florid lady, it is obvious, will never desert her piano, the young person faintly chirps. After a time we become conscious of a fourth individual of the fullest possible habit with a wealth of fat overflowing the velvet collar of a purple dinner-jacket. He clasps a violoncello to his stomach.

"Isn't it time that bloke did summat?" asks Ernie, spitting and preparing to "put on" a fag.

And the bloke does summat. He plays the slow movement from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne*, that ineffable accompaniment to joy deferred. He plays it exquisitely, the house is hushed, and the match goes out in Crowe's unheeding fingers. I tell Dick something of the story of the old shepherd finding happiness on the edge of the grave.

"I hope this isn't the edge of the grave for me," he says softly. "I mean for your sake, dad."

This is the only time I have known my son to make the millionth part of a move in the sentimental direction.

And then my uncle died, and I went north for the funeral. I found little changed in Manchester beyond the erection of a giant hotel and an untidy mess where

a hospital had been pulled down. There was no change in my old friend, Portwood. In his youth he had composed such a mask for grief as should endure till dissolution.

"I am thinking of retiring from this world of sadness," said the monstrous fellow, waving a plump yet mournful arm.

"Into your grave, Portwood?"

He smiled.

"I see your dear father did not neglect to instil the love of our national dramatist into his son," he said with a pomposity worthy of his many chins. "Let me see, had I the pleasure of—er——" Again he waved his lugubrious arm.

"No," I said.

"I myself am attached to the theatre," he went on. "Attached. You might not think it, Mr Marston, but I do a good deal in that line myself. In an amateur way. Purely amateur. Light comedy; what they call the June Premier. I find it a great relief from business, Mr Marston. A great relief. I hope to retire shortly. My son will follow me, but not, I hope for a while, in the professional sense."

Geoffrey and I rode in the same carriage. He hardly spoke and relieved himself throughout the journey with a low, melancholy and at times soundless pursing of the lips.

My uncle's will contained a clause conceived in his best vein of irony.

"I give and bequeath to my nephew Edward Marston the sum of one hundred pounds a year free of all tax, in the conviction that those pursuits which he has

“ preferred above commercial industry will lead to the
“ squandering of his fortune and bring him to the gutter
“ at the last. I leave him this pittance in the hope that
“ he may never taste of that bitterness which inevitably
“ attends the neglect of business principles.”

Stern, grim and consistent to the last. For, of course, he never knew the authorship of my infamous masterpieces and the fortune they brought me.

Of Monica I saw little.

On my return to town the news that Rodd and Dick had left for France.

§ vi

I have every letter that Claud ever wrote to me in the course of his brilliant career. Or if it is not brilliant I say with decision that brilliance lay ahead.

“ I begin to understand the meaning of discipline [he
“ wrote]. By dint of obeying every man’s behest, by
“ sheer force of habit, I am become a machine. I
“ take my officer’s shilling and get myself a glass of
“ beer. I jump to an order, I am smart on parade.
“ According to the papers the army has imbued me with
“ self-respect and self-control, has taught me the mean-
“ ing of freedom. . . . The truth is that the business
“ of war is so intolerable that flesh and blood acting
“ under reason and without discipline must inevitably
“ give way. It is the knowledge that disobedience is
“ death which, personally, makes me obey. And then
“ one counts on the thousand to one chance of getting

“through. At least I do. I fail miserably, not in
“heroism but in ordinary pluck. The men are splendid,
“splendid beyond words. . . .”

It had been to while away the infinite tedium of Salisbury Plain, to beguile the terror which stalks in Flanders that Claud wrote his one and only book. In the beginning highly worked, overworked even, it becomes towards the middle agitated, towards the end headlong. There the sentences breathe an urgency, an eagerness for dispatch, a desire to have done. Death was so obviously at hand. I hope and believe that Claud would have approved my editing which has been entirely confined to joining up the argument where a letter has gone astray. Where the gaps are simply a matter of Claud's quick wit against the dunderhead I have refrained. Heavens, what trouble I had to find a publisher who was neither hostile nor indifferent. Some of them talked paper shortage whilst others referred humorously—damn these—to the end of the war. At last I found a man who consented not to play the fool. I was not with him for more than two minutes. He said :

“Let me understand you, Mr Marston. You say the book is a masterpiece and you should know. You fear we shall lose on the book. Well, I've an uncomfortable feeling that we've published too much rubbish lately. In any case we've made a great deal of money and can afford something good. I'll give Mr Rodd's executors——”

“There aren't any,” I interrupted.

“I'll give whoever is entitled to it sevenpence-halfpenny on every copy we sell. We shall run off

fifteen hundred and publish at seven-and-sixpence. The bookseller's share will be half-a-crown. I am not interested in the ethics of the trade."

And so it was printed. The binding is of dark green with just the thinnest gold line along the top, and the title a parchmenty slip gummed on the back. Stout paper, black type and not a single printer's ornament. The whole appearance beautiful but not so that the ordinary reader will jib at it. One of Claud's favourite maxims was that a book is immensely affected by what it looks like and how it handles. I hope I have made him so clear to you that there is no need to insist on the book's tribute to the obscure and the little-understood. It bore the dedication : *To the despised and rejected.*

Last Judgments does not formulate any settled theories ; or rather, such theories as it contains are mostly contradictory. It is essentially the work of a man eager to grasp and record, who can anathematise at forty his adorations of twenty-five. It is a record of frank and gallant enthusiasms, of adventurous discoveries. It may be fairly claimed for its author that he made known to English readers at least one lovely story, Jean de Ferrière's *Une Ame Obscure*, and one exquisite piece of pure fantasy, Laforgue's *Pierrot Fumiste*. And, of course, Socialism, Socialism everywhere. Socialism even in such a poem as Maurice Magre's *La Tristesse du Nain Chinois*, that history of the Chinese dwarf who refused to dance for his Western hirers.

"Are not Westerners the very dregs and lees of civilisation? Do they not train their children to

devour one another? Do they not exhale the very odour of corruption?

Mais vous, dès que vos fils sont sortis de leur mère,
Ils apprennent la mort et ses arts raffinés.
Vous les faites pourrir dans le charnier des guerres,
Vivants, vous les sciez et vous les dépecez.

Je préfère, voyant vos mufles, vos babines,
Où sont inscrits vos sanguinaires appétits
Les peuplades sans front de l'île Sakhaline,
Les déterreurs de morts du désert de Gobi.

Votre soleil a l'air d'une lune et me navre.
Vous marchez en mangeant vos enfants dans vos bras
Et c'est ce qui vous fait cette odeur de cadavre
Qui sort de vos habits comme un nuage gras. . . .

And the dwarf tends to the bastinado his mirthless feet—should not the dancer's be merry?—suffers his cheek to be pierced by the hatpin of his infamous proprietress. Still will he not dance. His thoughts are with Buddha, the smiling Buddha of his jade-blue land.

Le fouet tourbillona sur le nain impassible.
Les mirlitons criaient et claquaient les drapeaux.
Dans sa face immobile ainsi qu'en une cible
La patronne planta son épingle à chapeau.

Et le lutteur vint lui donner la bastonnade,
Et la foire chanta son plaisir, ses amours. . . .
Toujours le nain voyait parmi le bleu des jades
Un Bouddha souriant au fond du demi-jour. . . ."

"I agree," Rodd goes on, "that the ticklish job of the *cæsura* is not always well managed and that Magre's rhyme is by no means millionaire. But he interests in a way that the older French poets with their classic frigidity have never attained to."

Here I am in sympathy with Rodd. What's *Hecuba* to Dick on twenty-two shillings a week? Rodd wanted poetry to deal with life as it is, with the life one knows, the life of the suspect saloon and the deserted quay, the questionable lurking shade, the sailor home from that blue, stale prison which is the sea. He wanted poetry to deal with rape and murder and incest in our colliery districts—what's *Phèdre* to him who was born in Lancashire? with abattoirs, blast furnaces and brothels.

“M. Magre is apparently young enough in mind to offer himself these things as an ultra-decadent spectacle, whereas he should be looking at them as realities. But at least he is honest with himself and with me.”

The book gave rise to most of the critical ineptitudes of which our Press is capable. Majesty rapped Claud over the knuckles with talk of “lapses into the æsthetic fallacy,” and of “the questionable utility in these strenuous times of mere æsthetic speculation.” And so rigidly held aloof from detailed argument. A critic of approved and authentic dullness hung upon the book a column dealing with “war as a stimulant to literature,” but carefully refrained from definitions. Professorial owls desired to know what dallying with the tangles of *Neæra*'s hair had to do with soldiering. “The writer has exchanged the pen for the sword. Let him that has put his hand to the sword——” etc. etc.

Rodd never saw his book. Shortly before it appeared he was killed, stupidly, unheroically, unnecessarily even, carrying a bucket. He foresaw that it would

be like that. Dick's account of his friend's end was precise and unemotional; Crowe coming home soon afterwards had little to add. . . .

The fellow seemed to think it natural that he should spend his leave with me, and he spent it almost in silence. He was vocal on one subject only, that of Dick.

"I foller 'im abaht like a dawg. *And* 'e don't pay no 'eed. Not a bone, as yer might say. Well, one day 'e give 'is bloody life fer me, near as a toucher, and I'd give my bloody life fer 'im. See?"

Shortly after this a letter from Westrom. He was a voluntary orderly in a Red Cross Hospital, Crawley Bridge way. He wrote:

"It is not much that I am doing. Once every hour
"I have to see to a poor fellow shot through the bladder.
"I have to turn another in bed. I have to be cheerful
"and reply to their jokes. My difficulty is with myself.
"I find that in spite of all endeavour I am not one with
"them, that I don't always understand them. I should
"certainly be incapable of enduring what they endure,
"but I am equally incapable of being consoled in all
"circumstances by a cigarette. A 'fag' is to these
"boys a mistress and a drug. It is true that I am not
"much of a smoker. I had no idea, until I took this job
"on, that the body could matter so infinitely. Thank
"God, we have had no deaths. I find myself taking
"refuge every now and again in my 'pawky provincial
"humour,' as you once had the charity to call my
"fun."

And so even old Westrom had found something to

do. Of all our little coterie there was only myself left in England who had done nothing, had talked and had done nothing. Had searched for an anodyne . . . an anodyne. . . .

I joined up. What has happened to me out here is of little interest; it has been unheroic and some months ago I took to pottering about Base Hospitals. And now I have received the letter which reveals what there remains in life for me to do.

“I must tell you, my dear father, of a terrible time we have both been through. We were asleep about two in the morning when it happened. Davies and Crossley were killed outright and Outhwaite, a very decent chap, died leaning up against me. I was frightened as I have never been frightened before. It was some time before I could get help. I am very sorry to say that Ernie will never see again. My left arm is off and I’m not sure whether I shall be able to walk properly as I got it pretty badly in the legs as well. Ernie threatens to carry me about, and fortunately I’ve got eyes for both. Not to be able to see—I think that must be the worst.”

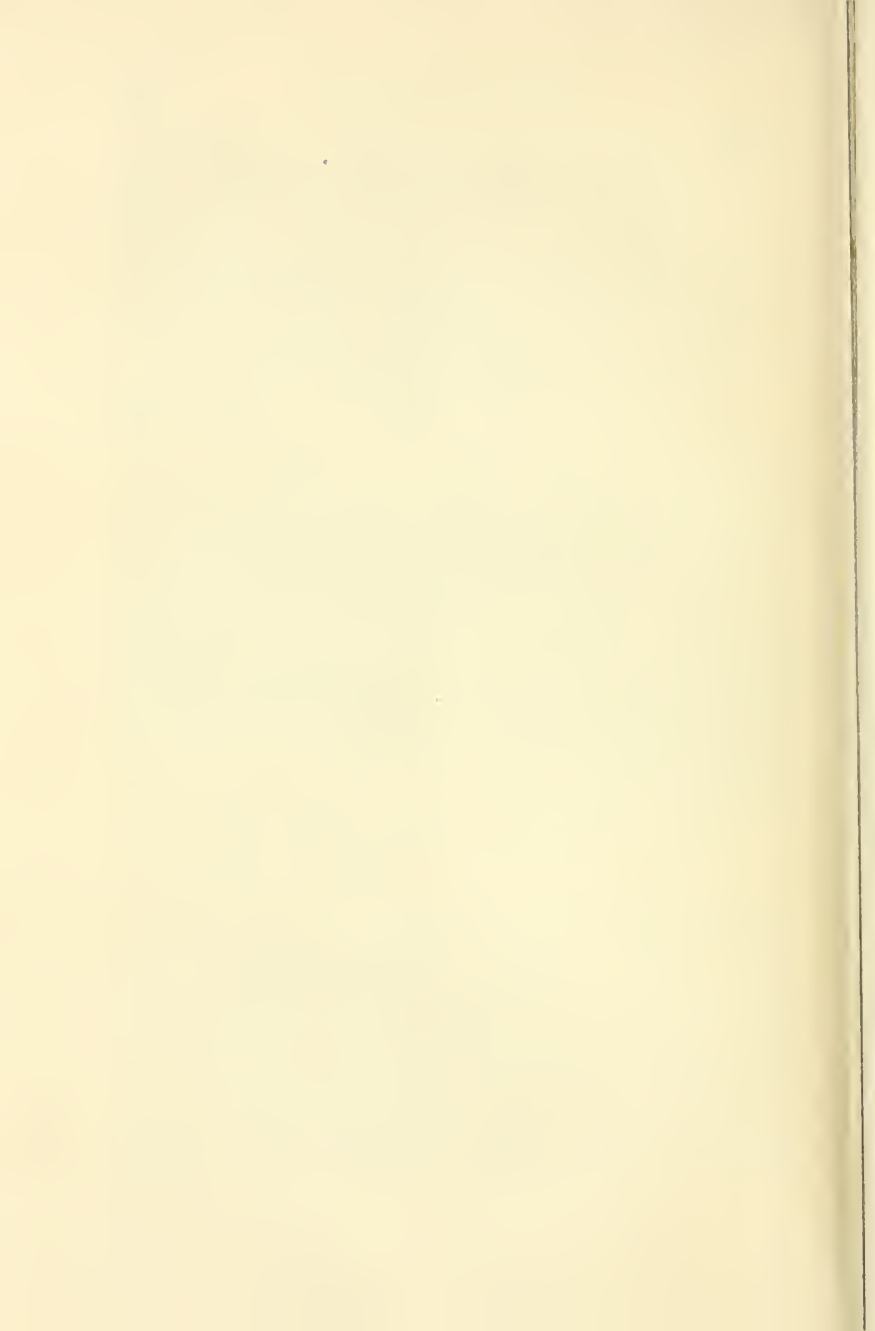
And that’s the end.

It had been easy to refrain, to leave unrecorded those early reachings-out after a happiness beyond that of eating, drinking, sleeping, marriage, a round on the links, the ordinary traffic of life; to keep silence over normal allurements and unheroic defeat. Rapture and disillusion, middling effort and mediocre accomplishment, the slackening of the desire for achievement—all these are too recognisably a part of every man’s life to have been worth the setting down. The excuse,

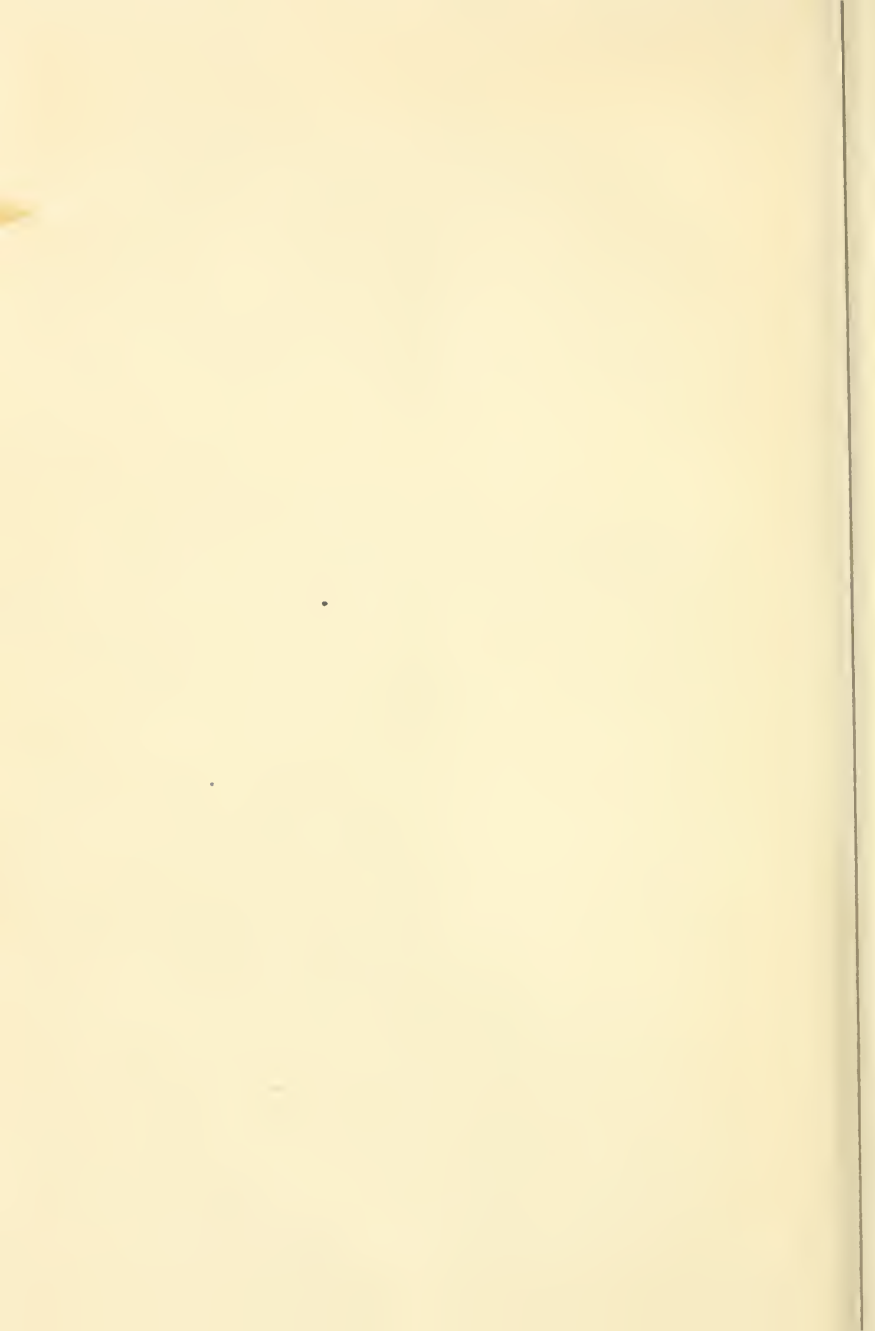
then? Not justification, though I will justify the theft, in Rodd's meaning of the word, of which such a son as mine was the reward and fulfilment. Still less a warning. I have a contempt for the weakling who would take shelter behind second-hand experience. I have written for my son's sake, that he may know his father to have been capable of emotion. The very excess and parody of egotism, you will say. So be it. I am what I am and with God be the rest.

Some wiseacre has said that the aim of philosophy is to direct thought to the examination and utilisation of the narrow space allotted by an inscrutable power to a finite humanity, and to refrain from speculation.

My mind is made up. I will speculate no more, neither on first and last things, nor on human right and wrong. My life and all I possess belong to two poor lads. I shall have trouble with Dick, of course, and Crowe is my only lever. If my boy will not accept of his father's abundance then his chum starves too. I thank God that I am rich and that riches are not all I have to give.









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